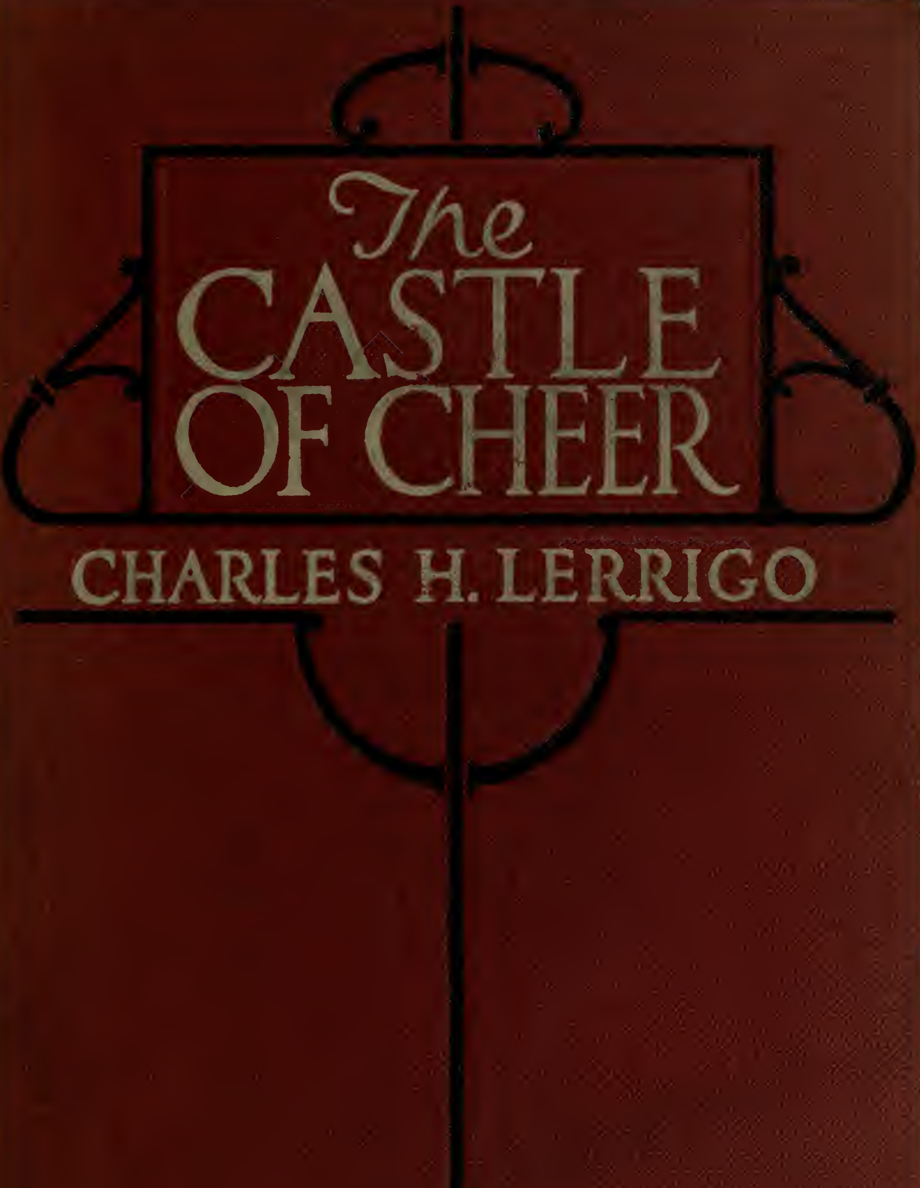

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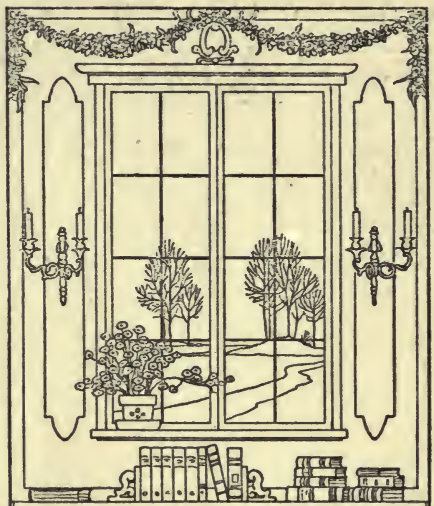

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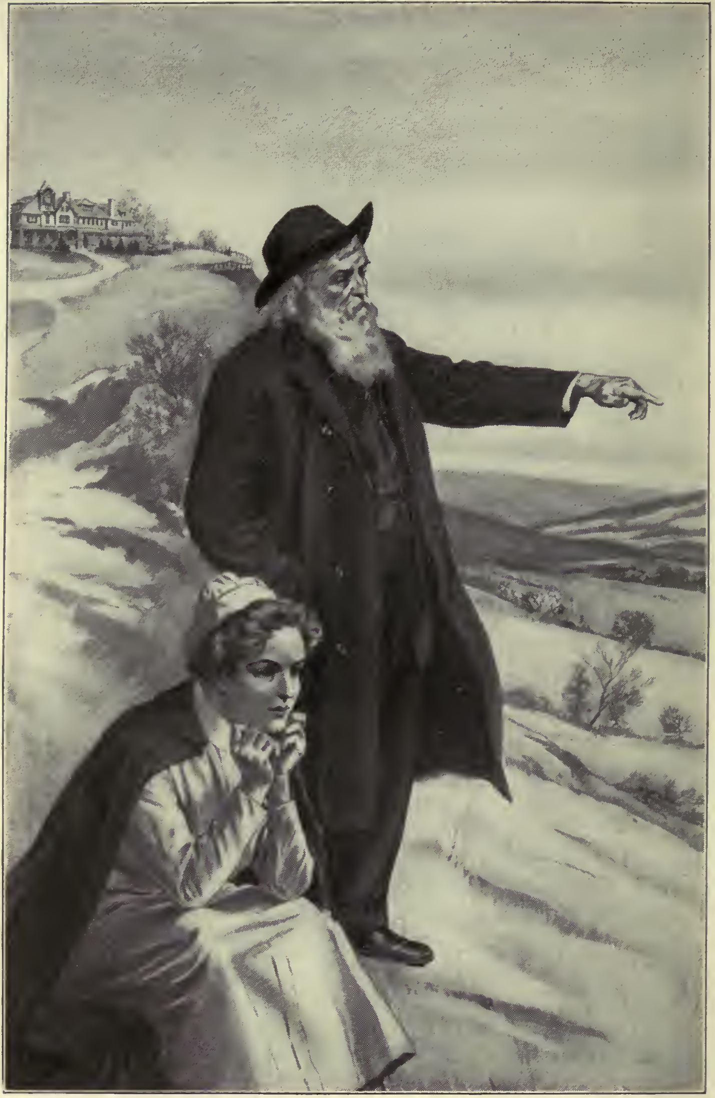

"A day like this, snow everywheres and a wind at yore back, is fine to blow away heavy thoughts," said the doctor.

(*See p.* 217)

THE CASTLE OF CHEER

BY

CHARLES HENRY LERRIGO

Author of "Doc Williams," Etc.

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To

The memory of Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau,
undaunted apostle of hope and cheer, this book
is humbly dedicated.

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I

SENTENCED!

SHUT up to himself Milton Stroud fought for a realization of his condition, strove for the old-time, confident grip that would face matters boldly and set them right.

His study was quiet with the evening stillness of a house in which all have learned to respect the studious master's moods—but the quiet did not soothe. The familiar cases of books which lined the walls had lost their friendly aspect, they were now but a weariness to the flesh. The unanswered—even unopened—letters of the day lay in an untidy heap; correspondence held none of the piquant interest of old—he loathed the thought of it. One thing only really mattered, and that thing his mind refused to grasp.

Six—nearly seven—years had the young minister here laboured with and for the tasks of his life. He had given himself without limit; lived his life with a full day beginning each early morning and crowding well into the night; feasted on problems of work; eaten up its difficulties; and now when accomplishment lay in his hand it had suddenly lost its savour.

Accomplishment! What, after all, had these years given of real accomplishment? Visions flocked in disorderly procession through his wearied mind as the tired head rested in those languid hands.

He recalled the work of his very first day in Chicago. His real life work began that day when he stood at the intersection of four of the city's busiest streets and seeing the multitude was moved with compassion. What a countless throng they formed as they rushed along, walked along, idled at windows, hesitated at crossings, chatted, laughed, sped by in silence or sometimes whined doleful complainings. The young minister, on his way to talk to the outcasts of life at the Salvation Army Home, felt the welfare of these countless people settle its weight upon him as one called to be an apostle.

When at last he stood at the little table in the dreary hall of the institution he saw not a miserable handful of the down and out, but the vanguard of a great, advancing host of the starved at heart, to whom he must minister and whose wants he must supply. The words that fell from his lips that night were as those that came when the heavens opened, and the unfortunates who heard them were uplifted as they who perceived the heavenly vision. The tongues of fire in that humble room marked a new life to some—they marked also the beginning of the unceasing purpose and incidentally the increasing fame of Milton Stroud.

But the man who sat now struggling in weary retrospect knew none of the results of that first commission. He knew not what it had brought to his hearers—least of all that there were two to whom it meant the most sacred hour of life. And both because it serves to show how little a weary, disheartened man is able to estimate his own work, and in order to supply a prologue to certain important happenings yet to come in Milton Stroud's career, we will tell, briefly, of these two.

They were among the crowd of listeners, but not of it. Father and daughter, they sat there a little apart, in distinguished retirement as became those who were among the patrons—financial patrons—of a world-wide uplift movement. The preacher had no shadow of thought that his message contained aught for the distinguished, grey-haired gentleman and aristocratic, richly-clad young woman who were so evidently spectators rather than audience. As a matter of fact he knew not whose quivering conscience the sharp arrows of his message would pierce. He was, for the time, only a voice—the voice of one crying in the wilderness of sin. He had gone from the place and back to his home, unknowing, before any sign came from this man and his daughter.

But the sign came and in revolutionary power.

"The half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man I restore fourfold!"

Thus spake the man who had long stood before the world as a standard of righteousness, yet had known in his heart that he was a whited sepulchre and that his gains were made by others' pains. His daughter acquiesced, though she had never so much as known how the wealth she spent so freely came to her hands or those of her father. Her own heart was tender and sore at the time, for but a short time before she had learned that the young man to whom she had pledged all the promise of her budding womanhood was unworthy of her trust, and in the freshness of her grief she felt that the whole world was nothing to lose.

That night, as if God had been giving him one last chance and was well pleased that he had taken it, the eminent man of business was taken from his house of clay, his program left unfinished, the gratification of restitution never to be his.

restitution! How seldom is it possible! The creeping branches of our evil run hither and yon, the offshoots grown far beyond our control. The rich man had a partner—a man whom he himself had made and who, with his son, had long had active conduct of the business. When the daughter, seeking to follow her father's wishes, brought them to this partner, she found that he was of a different mind. So different, indeed, was his mind, that by some manipulation he was able to prove very definitely that the rich man, dead, had nothing to restore; that he had no possessions, that the daughter had none, for there was nothing left to her; that all of the business and all of its assets were his and his alone.

Yet the words of the preacher had not been spoken in vain though more than six years had passed without a fulfilment of the rich man's promise. None of the toil of that six years had been in vain, little as the wearied worker dared claim for it. Looking back the years had been brief and barren. Yet he had been constantly called from one service to another and willingly had he made bare his chest for the pull, and squared his shoulders to the burden.

It was just lately that these moods of fickle temper had come to one who had known no moods; that this look of care and weariness had creased the brow hitherto unruffled; that these nights of restlessness had left him nerveless and weak; that his cold, which hung so persistently, had made him cough at such inopportune times. His friends were even more disturbed than he. They talked of vacation, of a long rest, of a trip to Europe. Stroud laughed at them as long as possible. But he had spent this day seeking the verdict of authority, getting an examination from an eminent specialist.

Did you ever wait your turn in a doctor's reception room when the whole world was at stake? Not just an impatient visit for medicine for some trifling ailment, but real waiting for a verdict, and possibly a sentence. The passage of time counts for little, for these may be the very last unsentenced minutes that you will ever have. After you have met that man in the next room, after he has looked you over, and listened to your chest and taken your blood pressure and examined a few little slides under a microscope—after all this and a few spoken words, you are to be as one set apart on this earth, for he will tell you that you are to live just so long—perhaps not to a day or a week, but scarcely longer. And what is the lapse of a half-hour's time when you wait in dread to hear such as this?

The burden of Chicago's multitudes had almost slipped from Stroud's shoulders, and he was just a man waiting for his sentence when at last the attendant waved him to the awful presence, and said presence promptly dispelled all thoughts of awe by its common everyday greeting.

"Why, hello, Stroud," spoke the rather jolly voice. "I hope you haven't been wearing yourself out on those waiting-room chairs."

"I waited my turn," replied Stroud.

"And that may have meant an hour. The girl ought to have known better. What can I do for you to-day?" The presence smiled as he significantly reached for his cheque-book.

"No, it's the other way round, to-day. I came to fill your pocket rather than empty it. I am feeling all run down. Some of my people seem rather excited about it. I want you to give me a little tonic to tide me over until my vacation next month."

"What do you know about tonics, Mr. Stroud?"

"I don't know anything about them."

"Why prescribe them for yourself, then?"

"No reason at all. The fact is, I've heard so many terrible hints from my people lately, and I've sat so long in that waiting-room conjuring up death and disaster, that the most pleasant thing I could think of was a bitter tonic. So I thought I'd suggest it."

"Well, don't talk nonsense to a doctor. Now sit down and tell me about how you feel and how long you've had any feelings."

The waiting-room congestion thickened while this conference ran away with precious minutes, but Stroud noticed no flight of time. When the doctor at last opened the side door for his exit, he handed him no medicine.

"I'm not going to argue things with you, Mr. Stroud," he said. "I've told you what your trouble is. Here's my prescription in this envelope. Open it when you get home. Then lose no time in getting it filled."

The significant words told Stroud that this was no ordinary prescription of drugs to be taken at convenient intervals. He knew well that it meant the wrenching away from everything worth while. So he sat long in his lonely thoughts until, finding that his dreary retrospect helped him not at all, he tore open the envelope and the sentence lay before him.

"Get some fellow to lift Chicago from your shoulders. Go to my friends at Latham Centre (card is enclosed. Ask for either Doctor Goodman or Doctor Williams). By the way, they call their place 'The Castle of Cheer.' In this case the cheer is for you. I give you three days to get to it."

II

JOHNNY LANGSTON SEES A FAIRY

JOHN CALHOUN LANGSTON, returning to Latham Centre in the rear Pullman of the overland express, knew nothing of the Chicago doctor. Yet he felt sure that the tired man with the flushed face, big, dark eyes, and mellow voice, who sought information about Latham Centre and The Castle was making a prescription journey. His usual generous disposition warmed by the pleasure of home-coming, Johnny was very glad to be of service.

"You will find the purest air in the world and the balmiest odour," he assured the stranger in generous enthusiasm.

The tired man gave a weary smile at the vigour of his language. "You must be a resident," said he.

"Worse than that," asserted Johnny. "I am a charter member. I was in it before it was a Centre—only a Corners. In fact I was born there."

"You are certainly a striking testimonial. I feel a little more hopeful just to look at you."

"You'll have lots better help than I can give you," replied Johnny. The train pulled into the station as he spoke. "I'll take you right out to The Castle. It's about three miles."

It was not Johnny's fault that he failed to fulfil his promise. A handsome grey automobile waited for him, and after greeting a few waiting people, he turned to invite the stranger to ride out to the sanatorium, but he had disappeared.

Johnny drove his car slowly along the smooth pavement of Latham Centre's principal street, his eye taking in such changes as had occurred in his absence. Near the door of The Inn (the sanatorium conducted by Doctor Goodman since Doc Williams had moved out to The Castle) he suddenly slipped his clutch and the car came to a stop. An unusual emotion gripped his interest, unusual not in its variety but in its intensity. At the door of The Inn waited the carryall of old Doctor Williams. Many times had Johnny viewed it since it had superseded the old buggy, and many times had it contained goodness and mercy and truth, but never before had he seen it carry such a load of positive loveliness. His limp foot slipped from the clutch pedal in his amazement. Instantly the clutch came into play and the massive car leaped forward to the curb. But in a second the driver woke from his trance, and jamming hard down on clutch and brake resumed control before serious damage was done. Only it had startled the team enough to get them under way, and his lovely vision was carried out of view.

Johnny shut off his motor and walked over to Mrs. Goodman, who stood at the door of The Inn watching the vanishing vehicle.

"Johnny Langston!" she cried. "I'm glad to see you again even if you were clumsy. When did you get home?"

"About five minutes ago and not a moment too soon. I have been wasting precious time away from here, Mrs. Goodman. Where does she live?"

"Why so fast, Johnny? Why this strenuous haste?

There were two she's. Didn't their dress tell you they were nurses?"

"There was but one for me, my dear Lady. And her dress was the one thing that quite escaped my observation. I'm sure she wore no hat. She had golden hair, wavy and bright; her eyes also were bright and the blue of them was like the sapphire; there was sunshine in her face and an aureole of joy surrounding her. Tell me where I may find her."

"Johnny Langston, that young lady is a friend of mine, and I will not have you making flippant remarks."

"Flippant! Flippant remarks. My dear Lady, this is the first time in my whole life that I have uttered anything so very earnest. Tell me quickly. Where shall I find her?"

"Where are you apt to find nurses?"

"Any of these new institutions may have nurses. It means nothing. But she was in the old doctor's carryall. Let me hope that she is with him."

"You may hope."

"Then let us go right out there, Lady. It is a beautiful day and you will be greatly benefited by the ride. Let me give you a treat in my new car."

"I have had one treat to-day, Johnny. I have been out with my doctor and have spent all the time riding that I can spare. I must go in to my baby."

"Bring the baby with you, Lady. Children are greatly benefited by fresh air. The infant death rate has decreased wonderfully since the general use of automobiles. Your baby is in his second summer, you know, and you can't be too careful about him."

But the Lady was proof against such pleading.

"You are quite silly, Johnny, making all this fuss about a girl whose face you have seen just once. I would be ashamed to be a party to such nonsense."

"You wouldn't if you felt as I do about it, Mrs. Goodman. Do you believe love to be a matter of careful selection; weighing this virtue against that defect and so forth, striking a balance and then inviting it to come on if all is favourable?"

"Of course I don't," she indignantly disclaimed.

"Don't you think it is heaven-born, and comes like a flash whether you will or no?"

"Something of that kind, I suppose."

"That is the way mine came, Lady. Like a flash. You know how long a flash takes? That is how quick mine came."

"But, Johnny, to tell this to me! Do you think I have forgotten the others? Did they also *go* like a flash?"

"There are no others," disdainfully Johnny repudiated the suggestion. "There never were any others. Friendships and fancies I have had; associations which came by constant companionship or by exclusion from all other company, or by propinquity or something of that kind. But nothing like this—a swift flash out of a clear sky—a powerful bolt from heaven; there has been nothing in any way resembling it! There never will be anything like it again. I want to do the thing decently. Will you go with me to perform a proper introduction if I wait until evening?"

"I'll think about it, Johnny. I'll almost venture to say I'll do it. Doctor Goodman is to go out to examine a new patient who is expected; and we will let you take the whole family."

Content, Johnny went back to his car. Evening was but a few hours away. He could give a certain share of his attention to some business matters for that length of time. In the meantime, trudging drearily along the highway to the sanatorium, its proprietor, inmates and nurses, was the weary young man of the Pullman.

III

ENTRANCE THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

THE stranger with the weary eyes and melodious voice had plenty of opportunity to ride to The Castle of Cheer. There were several hacks, an automobile livery, and, had he but known it, The Castle's very own carryall was in town and would have been at the station had the team not been frightened through the carelessness of an automobile driver. But he would have none of them. He had no desire to approach the place in the regular way. He dreaded approaching it in any way. And he positively would not go there committed as a patient—one bound hand and foot and delivered beyond chance of compromise. Let him steal up a by-path and reconnoitre.

The road was dusty, the sun was hot, a dank, penetrating odour crowded the atmosphere. There was no joy in his heart; there was only languor in his limbs; there was fever in his blood.

A farmer's well tempted his thirsty throat but he would not allow himself to step aside and only trudged doggedly on. If he thought such opportunities would be available at any time he made a mistake, for the wells along this road were mostly oil wells and the farmers had withdrawn themselves back into the country.

Walking a rapid if erratic gait no company overtook him, for most of the traffic consisted of slow-moving teams hauling heavy wagons or oil tanks through the thick dust. Occasionally a town-going driver met him and passed the time of day. It was from one such that he received directions which induced him to leave the main road and strike off along a pathway through the fields.

It was better here. He was rising into a different atmosphere. The smell disappeared and every step that he trod carried him out of the dreary spell of the oilfields. Very quickly he was gazing on a scene of beauty that would have delighted him had he not been so desperately starved and weary. The grass was green and some trees offered cooling shade. Instead of the black ooze which, beneath a deceptive cover of dust, lay treacherous in the ditches of the road, there trickled along by the hedge a brook of clear water.

But at last he reached the condition where his right foot refused to precede his left, where his arms would swing no longer but hung listless at his side, where he was obliged to sink in the shadow of the hedge. And there he dozed.

How long he slept matters little. Voices awakened him; voices and an odour of food. Peeping through the hedge he saw a cheerful party gathered in the gratifying shade of a clump of trees. They were evidently enjoying a picnic. Some baskets lay on the ground, their contents having been spread out on a newspaper tablecloth. A jar of clear water was delicately poised on the forearm of a jolly-looking fat man as he carefully restrained its contents from bubbling too gushingly into his glass.

It was the water that decided the weary traveller. He pushed his way through the gap in the hedge.

"Forgive me for intruding," he apologized; "but

I am so parched for a drink that I am bound to beg it of you."

"Not at all, not at all," the fat man assured him; but as his pleasant smile did not coincide with any such relentless decision it is possible that he meant the opposite. His action in passing the glass filled for himself confirmed this view.

When the traveller had drained the glass he handed it back with a grateful smile. "Delicious!" he exclaimed. "I never tasted anything half so good."

"You must take a little lunch with us," invited the fat man. "You need it, I can see easily. Sit right down now and don't say a word."

"That would be too great an imposition," the stranger protested.

"It won't be an imposition at all," insisted the fat man. "You will do us a favour. It is a cardinal principle of the Chaser's Club that no stranger shall cross our paths without a welcome."

"Your kindness is quite overwhelming," murmured the stranger. "I don't know that I ever met quite such a club."

"We claim to be unique in some things," grinned the fat man. "One of them is an entire absence of exclusiveness. We wish we always found as cordial a welcome as we give."

"It would be an unjust person who would hesitate to accord it."

"The world is full of them, my friend. Sit down here now and get hold of a drumstick. This picnic has scarcely begun yet. I think I will place you between myself and Miss Jolley, who will assist you on the left while I attend to the right."

It was a good place for a famished person. Miss

Jolley was of the capable, comfortable type that can turn a formal meal into a picnic or make a picnic better than a formal meal with equal facility. There was good humour in her little body and she had lived enough years to know better than pen it up, though, her thoughts having a much greater range than her vocabulary, it was often trammelled by orthodox methods of expression.

"Eat, man. It's a pleasure to see you," she insisted. "Not that I'm watching, being better brought up, I hope."

The traveller felt his spirits and courage revive under the stimulating refreshment and company.

"This is certainly grand," he murmured.

"Ain't it?" agreed Miss Jolley, alert at once. "I don't know when I've ate better chicken—or perhaps it's the salad you favour. The landscape! Oh, goodness, yes. It's grand enough. Let me give you some grape jell. Made it with my own delicate fingers. Honest!"

"It certainly looks good," said Stroud. "Its colour is exquisite."

"Its taste is exquisiter and that's what counts with a man, I guarantee," Miss Jolley opined. "And a slice o' this cake. It certainly is the best cake! Honest!"

Milton Stroud scrambled to his feet and brushed the crumbs from his clothing with a contented sigh.

"Let me show you around a little," volunteered the fat man.

The spot of the picnic supper was slightly elevated and the young man looked out over a very pleasant country. A little to one side at some distance a group of players were following the uncertain gambols of the golf ball over its hazardous course; somewhat nearer he could see tennis nets; as they strolled out of the shade of the trees the grass was yet cool about their feet.

He heaved a sigh of pleasure.

"It is all very beautiful and restful," he said. "I am very thankful to all of you for your hospitality. I would like to inscribe my gratitude upon your records. The building whose roofs I see yonder is the club-house, no doubt."

"Yes, that is the club-house."

"You are to be both congratulated and envied. Everything here breathes of peace and rest."

"You are right. It is the most peaceful place in the country."

"Peace is what I want," cried the traveller. "I don't care for any cure other than peace and rest. I wish I might stay here. But I must push on before dark. I am looking for the sanatorium,—the sanatorium conducted by old Doctor Williams."

The fat man laughed uproariously.

"Good enough," he cried, slapping his knee energetically. "You thought you were being entertained by the Chaser's Club. You are. We are all in it. Our full name is the Cure Chasers. We have our picnics because we must walk out in the open and this takes off the monotony. You are right on the Castle grounds this very minute! You sneaked in the back way."

IV

MR. STROUD MEETS DOC WILLIAMS

THE explanation came at the right time. Very soon followed scenes which spoke the character of the institution, suggestive but not unpleasant: a few people in wheel-chairs, a scattering row of cots, soon a quadrangle of small cottages, and at last a handsome building with porticoes and pillars and porches and great windows, and a flag waving at its summit.

It did not look so very formidable. The people did not look very formidable. The nurses, really the most imposing people of the whole institution, did not look very formidable. And last of all came the old doctor, who looked in no degree formidable.

The doctor was getting well on in years, but his vigorous manhood spoke of ripeness rather than decline. He himself best knew how long he had passed the seventy mark. Blessed with stalwart health and a heart at peace with the world, Time laid on him nothing to bend his shoulders or dim his eye.

As the laughing group approached he seemed to find a word for each and every one.

" It's fine for you as is able to get out and exercise. Don't furgit a little visit to them as can't, soon as ye git cleaned up an' rested. Clean up fust. One reason 'at folks feels better Sundays is because the good clothes an' clean shaves makes everybuddy look better, ye understan' me. Plumb wonderful what a good bath an' a fresh suit 'll do to make a sick man look well."

His keen eye took in the stranger at once, but he made no move toward him until the crowd had disappeared. Then he turned on him a face full of smiles and chuckles.

"Jes' like a lot o' great childern!" he commented. "But it's good for 'em. It's good for 'em. Ain't nothin' any nearer to innocence than a little child, ye understan' me. Ain't nobody can get over grief so easy nor be quite as hopeful of to-morrow. The nearer ye get to that class the less ye'll have to weigh ye down an' the quicker ye'll throw it off."

"I suppose you mean that for me, too?" asked the traveller.

"You, too," affirmed the doctor. "Name's Stroud, ain't it?"

"Quite right. You were expecting me?"

"We've been most mightily expectin' you. Every time the mail comes in some o' them Chicago people as knowed you was comin' writes me a letter to tell me to be good to ye. It's to make up for what they ain't been, I reckon. Up here, now, we'll learn ye how to be good to yourself."

"I'm glad my people are so thoughtful," Stroud smilingly responded.

"It's fine, ain't it?" The doctor smiled enthusiasm. "It helps a lot to know how much folks care. Some as comes here thinks nobuddy cares an' I have hard work with 'em till I git 'em to see what a liar the old devil is for telling 'em such stuff, ye understan' me. But you're one as knows that lots o' people cares, an' if they didn't care quite as soon as they might mebbe they ain't altogether to blame."

"No, it was my own fault," Stroud admitted.

"Don't blame yourself. Don't blame nobody. 'Twon't do no good. Forget it all. Ye've come to The Castle a purpose to forget."

"But I hated to come."

"I know ye did. Most of 'em do. They's some demon of unrest gits a holt of 'em 'at tells 'em they can't give up. The world won't move jest right if they drops out. All these schemes an' plans an' ambitions that's been in their heads an' their hearts so long is goin' to come to nothin', ye understan' me."

"They do, too," interpolated Stroud.

"Well, mebbe they do, an' mebbe it's jest as well. One thing sure they have to let go of 'em. That's one reason they git well s' much better here than ever they can at home. The air's mighty nice an' soft an' pleasant up here but 'tain't s' much different f'm what most of 'em gits at home. The food we put out is callated to make good flesh an' blood, an' our cook gits it up fine, an' our nurses gives 'em jest whatever's best, but 'tain't s' much better 'n what lots of 'em gits at home, ye understan' me. They don't do a lick o' work here but some on 'em could drop work 'thout comin' here. But the difference is in the other things 'at they drops. That's what I have to learn 'em."

"Are they apt pupils? Do they learn well?"

"Some on 'em early an' some late but most of 'em learns. All these schemes, all these plans, all these ideas, jest the very blood o' life to 'em; arter they been here awhiles the schemes seems not quite so important, awhiles longer an' they ain't so familiar, a little while more an' they's a strangeness about 'em an' they don't seem to amount to much nohow, an' by the time their bodies is takin' on new, sound tissue, their minds is takin' on new, sound ideas an' they begins to see what's really worth livin' for, ye understan' me. We're most mighty disappointed if they goes home without a bigger point o' view, as well as a bigger body; we are."

"I hope I'll take on a broader viewpoint," Stroud smilingly assented. "But of course I can't stay here many weeks to do it. Two months is my limit."

"That's another idee you'll have to lose, son," the old man calmly assured him. "You preachers limits Almighty God 'bout as bad as anybody. You just think His work can't by no means go on less'en you're right there to watch it. Jest as well lose the idee, son. Yo're here now, an' yo're goin' to stay here jest as long as we need to keep ye. When ye go f'm here we callate to send a well man back to yore people."

The impracticable preacher smiled a faint assent which, being interpreted, announced very clearly: "Just as well humour the old gentleman. But I'll leave this institution when I get ready, and it's got to be mighty quick."

And the shrewd old man, reading the smile, had also his own thoughts, which being likewise interpreted were: "We'll see about that."

V

THE HEAD NURSE AT THE CASTLE

THERE is no accounting for popular taste and the same may also be true of popular smell. Doctor Goodman thought that with the development of the oil industry there would be an end to the usefulness of Latham Corners as a health resort. It might survive the noise and the traffic and the increased activity, but no seeker of health would tolerate that smell—the oil smell, the strong smell, the smell that penetrates, that creeps in even through closed windows and locked and barred doors.

Doctor Goodman expressed himself very positively to his old friend Williams, but evidently not convincingly.

" It's His wonderful stuff that makes the smell," said the old doctor. " It must be good for folks."

And so the expression got abroad. It was good for folks. It was like a medicine. It was a feature of the treatment—an added attraction. The same spirit that makes people love to consume a dark-brown mixture out of a large, odd-shaped bottle, and feel that in so doing they are certainly delivering a knock-out blow to that hydra-headed monster, disease, made them feel that in inhaling this strong, dank odour of crude oil they were certainly enlisting a most active therapeutic agent in their campaign.

It is a hard job for the common everyday person to realize that in the battle for health we wrestle not against flesh and blood, and so although disease may be intangible, elusive, invisible, the demand is none the less clamorous that the weapons shall be mighty in shape and structure and calculated to make a loud report in explosion.

So the place grew in favour more than ever as a health resort. The town developed like a healthy babe gaining its half-pound a week. It built up business streets, it laid pavement, it erected street lights, and talked of water and sewerage. It elected a mayor and other town officials, who accepted graft, promulgated a speed ordinance, and did many of the acts common to officers of much larger cities. It changed its name to Latham Centre and it became a centre for the oil industry and health fads.

The most recent addition to Latham Centre's supply of sanatoria was an institution rejoicing in the optimistic title of New Hope. Its superintendent and proprietor was a Doctor Middane. His credentials had been accepted as quite substantial very naturally, consisting as they did of money enough to pay cash for his ground and erect a substantial building. More than that Latham Centre would ask of no one, and if Doctor Goodman chose to cast aspersions upon the new doctor's character it were well to remember that he was an active competitor.

The thing Doctor Goodman chose first to attack was the production and advertising by the New Hope doctor of an instrument known as the Oxyjuvenator, which ordinarily sold for thirty dollars, but as a matter of introduction, and expressive of good will to the homefolks as it were, was announced for sale to Latham Centre residents only, at a discount of twenty per cent. Even a schoolboy could see that this meant a gratuity of six dollars offered to every citizen. One had only to learn that the Oxyjuvenator "made disease in any form a mere inconvenience of short duration" to see how surely it would ruin Doctor Goodman's business and naturally embitter him.

Doctor Goodman also criticised adversely the announced object of New Hope to cure tuberculosis by the injection of the Hermann serum which had received so much advertising in the East. He said frankly that the Hermann serum was a fake and invited the New Hope doctor to bring suit against him for thus expressing his opinion. But the New Hope doctor was too busy selling his Oxyjuvenator to a grateful public and taking care of people who desired the Hermann cure.

The principal sanatorium of the town was The Inn, originally built by old Doctor Williams, but assigned to his friend Doctor Goodman when he moved out to The Castle. The Inn had grown far beyond the old doctor's capacity. To maintain its development it became necessary to equip it with apparatus the use of which required a master mind and hand, so he gladly resigned it to the best man of his acquaintance. And under Doctor Goodman's management its fame had increased until its recognition was nation-wide. No wonder Doctor Goodman did not wish to have his business ruined by the Oxyjuvenator.

The old doctor had built The Castle of Cheer shortly after the death of his sister, known the country round as "Aunt Mercy"; and he had chosen the name because, erected high on Goodman's Bluff, it stood forth prominently, reminding him of a fortress of hope, and giving promise of good cheer. He had dedicated it to the care of patients afflicted with tuberculosis because he felt that such patients needed more than any other class the kind of care that he was able to give and because of a feeling that there was much discrimination against them. The Castle had been well-planned and money had not been spared in its development. The doctor's oil-well money all had gone into it, and his hopes were that once established it would be self-supporting.

The old doctor did not depend entirely upon his own skill. All patients entering were examined by Doctor Goodman or one of his assistants from The Inn, and these skilled physicians could always be relied upon for assistance. In addition there was maintained a staff of trained nurses in whose hands was left all of the routine administration.

When the Reverend Milton Stroud, late of Chicago, concluded his chat with the doctor and passed on into the main building he was met by the real administrator of The Castle—the head nurse.

She, too, guessed his identity.

" You are Mr. Stroud," she said, coming forward to meet him.

" You all seem to know me. I hope I have not been too much announced," he replied, a trace of annoyance in his tone.

The nurse smiled. It was a very captivating smile and quickly changed his pique to good-nature. Some of the anxious members of the Ladies Aid who had written letters asking especial care for their beloved pastor would have been worried about that smile.

" It is only that a good many have written telling us how very good care we must take of you and how quickly they must have you back," she explained.

" They are overanxious," he said. " There is very little the matter with me and a rest of a few weeks will put me in fine shape."

If the deep eyes and delicate skin told her a different story she at least offered no argument. He appreciated her silence, and the sympathetic way in which she conducted the customary entrance routine took off much of the trying formality. She rested him.

He was not the first patient to make this discovery about Mary Standlaws in the few weeks she had been at The Castle. The old doctor considered her his greatest triumph. Her coming had lifted from his shoulders executive duties for which he was unfitted and left him free to bestow upon the institution and its individual members the paternal guidance and fellowship which profited them so greatly.

She was not old—this nurse—for all she was so capable, certainly not yet thirty. She was not severe, yet her assured manner allowed no contradiction and her directions were quite beyond dispute. She had such a serene air of confidence that one failing to believe her able to conduct his case would have been captious indeed. She commanded confidence, inspired respect, created harmony, and in her strength the weak rested. In that strength might be read that somewhere this calm life had been tempered by the fires of experience, for only thus is such serenity and poise attained. When the Reverend Milton Stroud wrote to his mother he said: " You feel you trust in her, you leave your burdens with her, she rests you, she soothes you, she charms you, and you call her beautiful until you see her sister Gladys."

But he did not see her sister at that time.

" You have not yet seen Doctor Goodman, Mr. Stroud? "

"I have seen no one."

"Doctor Goodman will examine you this evening then."

She made another note in her book and closed it as if to say that she was through with him. But he sat in restful silence.

"You have been in Chicago six years, have you not, Mr. Stroud?" she asked as she rose to her feet.

"Just six years!" replied the preacher. His mind went back that interval of time to the day when he stood, in all the pride and strength of his young manhood, at the intersection of two of the city's busiest streets and, watching the interminable procession of hurrying human beings, vowed that it should be his part to turn the glances of some of them from the city streets to eternal glory. "Just six years!" he repeated.

"Then I have heard you preach once. I felt sure of you as soon as I heard your voice. It is not one to forget."

"So you remember? I had at least one attentive listener in my church that Sunday." He laughed in pleasure.

"It was not Sunday, nor was it in your church," she replied. Her usual calm had left her and her face flushed. She also had turned back the leaves of the years and was looking on a long-covered page at a scene that was not all sweetness.

"I was little known that first year and had few opportunities to speak outside of my own pulpit. Do you mind telling me where you heard me?"

"Yes. I would rather not," she replied.

"I beg your pardon if I have brought to your mind some painful scene," he added. "I know that nurses are often called to strange places."

"I was not then a nurse," she said. "Only a common idler."

The last words left her lips as if by some compulsion of will which she would fain have controlled. She left him hurriedly, and he only knew to what quarters he was assigned when a young nurse came to show him the way.

VI

"SOUND AS A DRUM"

MILTON STROUD, a man of education and furthermore a man of thought, was secretly a trifle disturbed at the idea of yielding the superintendence of his physical welfare to the old doctor, whose speech indicated that book culture was not extensively called to the aid of his natural shrewdness. The nurse's intimation that there would be an examination by a Doctor Goodman was therefore comforting and when at last the doctor was shown into his room the young minister drew as much assurance from his inspiring presence as he had drawn restfulness from the calm of the head nurse.

Doctor Goodman was in fact a man to meet ideally the standard for a physician which training, education, and knowledge of the world had formulated in the mind of the Reverend Milton Stroud. His age was near fifty—young enough to flame with youthful vigour, old enough to steady the flame with rich experience. He was of erect figure and easy carriage and the fact that his broad shoulders bent slightly with the scholar's stoop only served to bring him within easy reach. A closely trimmed moustache in no way concealed the firm lines of a handsome mouth and the clean-shaven cheeks and chin indicated just such a resolute character as would be in keeping with the pleasant, sparkling eyes. He was too unconscious of himself to be imposing, too much interested in his patient to be haughty, yet an easy dignity covered even the most minute of his actions and while the humblest felt at home with him, the highest would not dare to condescend. As to matters of dress it is sufficient to say that he was personally conducted by Mrs. Goodman.

There remained no unsatisfied yearnings for "a good, thorough examination" in the heart and soul of Milton Stroud when Doctor Goodman at last laid his instruments and case-book to one side and indicated that all was complete. He was fully satisfied that for once in his life his case had been thoroughly investigated. He believed that the doctor knew the secrets of his innermost soul. If there was anything in his whole career that had not been brought to the light and turned inside out he was unable to recall it.

One long, anxious look the young man cast at the doctor before undertaking to plumb the depths of information that he knew must be concealed behind that placid countenance. Then with his anxiety completely squelching his feeble attempt at jocularity, he put forth the well-worn question: "Sound as a drum, am I?"

"Poor comparison, that," said the doctor. "A drum is nothing but a strip of hide stretched tight across vacancy—nothing more than a bag of wind. You aren't like a drum."

"But you find nothing wrong with my lungs?"

"It would be no kindness for me to say so, Mr. Stroud; for all the statements I could make would not alter the fact that your lung condition is poor. But I will say this: I find nothing beyond repair."

The young minister lay quiet and grave for a sober minute, a little rapid jerk of the eyelashes his only motion.

"Perhaps it is best to acknowledge it," he said at last. "I have been fighting the admission for weeks. I hated to give up."

"But giving up is the very best thing to do in your case. Not giving up hope but giving up work and worry and strife and everything but the determination to get well. The day when we deceived a man by telling him all was well is long past. There may have been some justification for such a course when we thought every subject a hopeless victim. But now, when we give up few cases as hopeless and accept so many as curable, to dally in such a way is rank folly and to continue in it is outrageous crime. The patient with tuberculosis needs a full recognition of his case for the express purpose that he may proceed intelligently toward a cure."

"Thank you, Doctor, I can see that you are right. But you don't know how it hurts to admit the weakness. It seems so long as I can feel that I have just a cold or just a cough I am not so different from any one else, but the minute I acknowledge this disease I am a marked man; I had almost said a doomed man."

"You must allow me to dispute both statements," said Doctor Goodman, his genial smile softening the contradiction. "They are both wrong and the second just as much so as the first. The first is wrong because I do know how it hurts, just exactly how it hurts. Within a few hundred yards of this stands my own home on the Bluff, built by myself at a time when, following years of intimate contact with the disease in my own family, I was compelled to admit to myself, if to no one else, that I also was infected. Yes, I know exactly how it hurts, although to-day I may draw up my shoulders and expand my chest and say: 'Look at me!'"

"You a consumptive?" exclaimed the young minister with a sudden, brightening interest.

"Yes, sir, I a consumptive. And I could name to you a dozen men doing really great work in the fight against the disease whose interest was born in their own personal fight. The great Doctor Trudeau who has taught us so much and has given heart to so many men and women has all the time been fighting the good fight and defying the enemy in his own person."

"Doctor, these are good words to me. I see how little I knew when I said that you could not understand how it hurt."

"And you also see that my answer explodes your second fallacy. Nothing can be more depressing than the attitude of considering yourself either a marked or a doomed man. If you stay with us at The Castle and follow our instructions there is just one thing doomed—that one thing is your despair and pessimism. You will replace it by a lot of valuable information which followed intelligently will keep you well."

"Doctor, I am already glad to be here. Your visit has helped me tremendously. I hope for the privilege of seeing you often."

"You will see better people than I. Some of the happiest and most devoted nurses in the whole grand army of the federation against disease, and my old friend Williams, the greatest optimist in the medical profession. I'm not going to discuss anything more with you to-night. I want you to rest well. All you have to do is obey orders."

While this long examination was in progress the young gentleman who had officiated as chauffeur for the doctor had not failed to use well his opportunities. It will be recalled that he was a volunteer of the name of Langston and that his motives in giving service were not those of the broadest altruism.

Artfully insisting on holding in his arms the cooing heir of the Goodman family, the young man promptly found himself the rallying point of The Castle's feminine population. Among so many, some old acquaintances, some hitherto unknown, but all desirous of making up to so charming a burden if not to the bearer, it was an easy matter to secure an introduction to the fairy vision of the afternoon in a perfectly natural way.

"Do let me hold him for just a minute," pleaded the fairy.

Johnny gazed at her with anxiety in his face.

"I hardly think I dare let him go away from me to such a youthful person," he objected.

"Mr. Langston, I have held more babies than you ever saw," expostulated the fairy, Miss Gladys Standlaws. "I would like you to know that I served six months in the Sea Girt Babies' Home."

"But I don't believe this baby is sea-girt," still objected Johnny. "Perhaps I might let you take him for a minute if you sat up on this seat, where I can take him if he cries. He isn't used to strangers."

"The idea! As if the little dear wouldn't rather have some woman hold him, who understands babies, than any man living."

But, after glancing around, and concluding that Sister Mary was safely housed with the doctors and their patient, she did step to the seat of honour and held out her eager hands. And, would you believe, that exasperating infant had to whimper!

The young nurse, all confusion, anxiety, and tenderness, was soothing him with soft nonsense in a moment, but Johnny, a gleam of triumph in his eyes, had his own prescription to offer.

"He wants Uncle Johnny to take him riding," he declared. "You must take a post-graduate course with the renowned specialist, Doctor John Langston, Miss Gladys. Sit still and he will show you the very most up-to-the-minute method of soothing wailing infants."

The big car moved smoothly and almost noiselessly down the driveway, the nurse still occupied with the baby.

"Aren't some of the rest coming?" she asked, anxiously, as she looked up a moment later and perceived that they were out on the broad highway.

"I'm afraid they'd hardly catch us, Miss Gladys," the chauffeur replied with a glance at his speedometer, "but we shall scarcely be gone a minute."

They had been gone quite a good many minutes when she again remonstrated.

"Really, Mr. Langston, we must be turning back. We are going quite too far. Supposing something should happen."

"Something has happened, already, but this hard, unsympathetic machine will never realize it," sighed Johnny.

Notwithstanding her laugh, a flush of deep colour stole into the girl's fair skin.

"I think it is time to start home," she said, quietly.

And then something really did happen. The road was narrow for turning, but Johnny was very skilful and quite confident. His confidence was not ill-placed so far as it related to his own skill, but unfortunately he also applied it in favour of the dryness of a ditch overstrewn with litter. Crushing through the litter, his wheels sank deep in a muddy cyst, and as the engine exerted its power it was but to drive them deeper.

"You never can tell," Johnny confessed, ruefully. "I didn't suppose there was any moisture within a mile up, down, or around. I must now pluck a fence-post and pry this car out of its little bed."

He cheerfully pulled down such portions of a fence as seemed to suit his purpose, but he was too late—the grinding of his engine had embedded the wheels firmly in their clinging banks.

It was growing dusk. Johnny ran to a farm-house and borrowed both a spade and the farmer. Ten minutes' digging and the building of an artfully inclined plane of boards might reasonably have coaxed any decent automobile out of its hole. But the machine had decided for indecency. It cared not that a nurse was breaking the rules of an institution, that a compromising situation was fast developing, and that a very anxious mother was praying that that foolish, harum-scarum Johnny would bring back her baby before its father concluded his work and asked to return home.

It was almost dark when Johnny gave up his efforts and sent the farmer on a run for his best team, and when, properly yoked, they yanked the machine upon a good solid road and Johnny crossed the farmer's palm with an ordinary week's wages, night was unmistakably present.

The car rushed along, its glowing headlight shooting strange shadows through the quiet lanes, its siren loudly heralding its advance, its occupants bravely trying to make talk, for the repentant Johnny lost his usual glib facility as he realized how embarrassing was the situation into which he had inveigled his fairy.

At last they slackened speed for the entrance gates.

" I hope you will forgive me for this wretched performance, Miss Gladys," pleaded Johnny, with a last sad effort. " You've acted like a sportsman with never a word of complaint, but I know you must hate me. I'll explain everything to the Goodmans on the way home, and then I'll go away off and not show myself again until driven by necessity. Please, please remember this evening by its earlier happenings."

Baby was sleeping quietly as Gladys tenderly laid him in the arms of his anxious mother, but there was no likelihood of an early somnolence for the other members of the party.

VII

JOHNNY BRINGS BACK THE BABY

WHEN Doctor Goodman left the young minister's room and stepped into the hall he was followed by the head nurse, who had, as usual, attended him. In the brief time of her rule the doctor had already discovered in her a pearl of great price. He was quite accustomed to seeing her view every case with unflagging professional interest, so there had been no surprise to him in the intensity with which she had followed his examination nor had he seen any personal interest superimposing itself upon the professional. Doctor Goodman was a clever man, as indeed are most doctors, but like other doctors his cleverness did not extend to reading the thoughts and intents of the heart. Therefore his surprise was great when, quick as the door closed behind them, the nurse faced him with the unprofessional question, put with as much concern as if spoken by some annoying relative: "Doctor, do you think he will get well?"

"What a question from our head nurse!" he exclaimed. "What is this institution for? What did you see about him that I overlooked to make you so suspicious?"

She blushed in embarrassment, so unusual a deviation from her normal composure that the doctor felt embarrassed also.

"I saw nothing at all out of the way, Doctor. It is a foolish question to ask."

" Not at all; merely an unusual one for you. Perhaps you have some personal interest—an old acquaintance possibly? "

" No, Doctor. I heard him preach in Chicago years ago, but that is the extent of our acquaintance."

" Well, he will get well all right, if he is made of the stuff I think. But he will be a bed patient for a time, anyway, and to do a good job for him will keep him with us the rest of the year. I hope he will be able to arrange for expenses all right."

" Yes, Doctor. It was one of the first things he mentioned. And I am very glad, I assure you, for we are already caring for as many free cases as we can stand."

" That fraud at New Hope sent you another one the other day, did he? "

" Yes, Doctor. That makes five he has passed along to us and three weak-minded people with money he has stolen from us in the short time that I have been here. He must be quite a genius. I am tempted to go to see him."

" You would be disappointed. He is a very superficial person with a glib tongue and somewhat ornamental appearance. Not at all the person you would admire and yet a dangerous competitor with ordinary people."

" I suppose it's no use suggesting that we refuse to take these charity patients he refers to us unless they pay at least actual cost."

" Not if you want to keep the old doctor's good opinion. No; the only way we can shut off an unfair proportion of charity cases is by keeping the place filled up with paying ones so that all of our space is occupied."

" Even then I suppose the doctor would want to make room for them by turning out himself."

" I suppose he would. He knows as well as any one that he is being overreached; but he says ' it ain't the fault o' the pore folks as comes here. They're sick an' need help; where ye goin' to send 'em? ' "

" Well, I shall be glad if you will just step into the office and look at the books a moment, Doctor. All accounts are paid up to date, but there are many things soon to be met and not much to do it with unless some of these patients who haven't paid anything so far should come in for a legacy or win a lottery prize. It's no light matter running a sanatorium and carrying patients free, even a few of them, when the treatment has to run for weeks and weeks. I really don't see how it can be done."

" Don't be too much discouraged. The doctor has several good friends who will stand by him rather than see his work stop. You don't find him down-hearted, do you? "

" Doctor down-hearted? I should say not." She laughed as she recalled his words a few weeks earlier when with some hesitation she had called his attention to affairs.

" It's all right, daughter. We'll jest go along an' do the best we can for everybuddy, all sharin' alike jest as long as they is things to do with. Don't have no fears, daughter. The silver an' the gold are His an' the cattle on a thousand hills; an' this is His work."

" No, the doctor never gets discouraged," said Doctor Goodman. " Just the same I wish you would make a special point of showing him how things stand to-morrow sometime."

" All right, Doctor. I will do so."

" What does that New Hope rascal use as an excuse for sending his charity applicants up here? "

" He is quite clever about it, Doctor. He gets their history and gives them an examination chiefly directed at their financial condition. If it is unsatisfactory he tells them that he must be honest with them, that their case is not one that his treatment would be likely to help, that as a matter of fact their chief trouble is overwork and malnutrition and they will be best helped by coming to The Castle."

" It is the old, old story. Always watch the man who says: ' I'll be honest with you.' "

" Yes, Doctor, I will. Occasionally one of them really is. Here's a man now who is doing his best."

She directed him to the account of one of the new patients and together they continued the engrossing task of examining the institution's finances. A certain young attorney of the neighbourhood would have been much gratified to know how this occupation carried them into the time when lights became necessary. They were, in fact, still at it when they heard the impatient note of an automobile horn.

" That must be Johnny, anxious to go back home," said the doctor, looking at his watch. " It is later than I thought. I am glad you are bringing such thoughtful interest to bear on our problems, Miss Mary, and I will certainly give all the help I can. I will send our attorney to this quack at New Hope and endeavour to curb his desire to steal our paying patients even if we cannot restrain him from shipping to us his own undesirables. It isn't much good talking to Doctor Williams about it, but you can at least bring the facts to his attention."

As they stepped to the door a little group came up the porch steps. Mrs. Goodman came first, carrying the sleeping baby, with her came the old doctor, and bringing up the rear was Johnny Langston and a young woman wearing a flushed face and a nurse's costume. The automobile, its engine still in motion, sang its rhythmic song a few feet away.

"Been passing the time of weary waiting taking a ride, have you?" Doctor Goodman asked of no one in particular.

"Jest the young folks has," answered the old doctor, who had just come from one of the cottages.

"I hope you and baby enjoyed it, dear," Doctor Goodman asked his wife.

"Baby went to sleep," was as much as Mrs. Goodman felt called upon to explain, thereby winning the eternal gratitude of two young hearts. How very good of her, thought the young man, and how sweet of her, thought the young woman, and how fine to have everything passed over without this critical head nurse giving it attention, thought they both.

But, alas, there was yet Fate to consider. Cruel the way fate makes sport of our plans and even makes our kindly disposed friends part of its armament. Enter Miss Jolley, all innocent of evil intent.

"Oh, you are back! Had a fine ride I guarantee. I thought it was just fine to see you two ride off together—just you two adventurous young people and the dear little baby. Honest, I—why, what have I said now?" She read dismay in several faces and surprise in others. "Have I put my foot in that same cavity again! Honest, I don't know what I'm talking about half the time. There might have been a dozen in that back seat and my short-sighted eyes never seen 'em."

Tangled in her flow of language she hastily fled.

But her words remained; and the young nurse looked appealingly at her sister as she hurried by to her quarters; and Johnny, driving home in the still night, took the chaffing remarks of Doctor Goodman in much less than his usual good humour.

VIII

A BED PATIENT

DO flowers from the same parent stem always bloom in like colour, fragrance, and beauty of form? Far more dependably than children from the same stock present the same characteristics. If you have the happiness of being one of a big family you know that none of your brothers or sisters is just like you, neither are you just like any one of them. The versatility with which Nature produces variations in type is one of her greatest secrets.

Mary and Gladys Standlaws were alike only in their amiable kindness. Whereas Mary was tall and commanding, Gladys was short and dimpling. None of the calmness and poise displayed by her sister was prominent in the rippling merriment of Gladys' laughing existence. If Mary's brunette dignity received a complimentary adjective it would certainly be "handsome," but Gladys' sunny features were frankly pretty, and not merely pretty, but very pretty. Mary smiled, but whereas her smile was kind and pleasant, that of Gladys was mirthful and joyous. Mary might sometimes hum gently a sweet tune as she worked, but Gladys sang aloud a lay of rejoicing wherever her duty permitted. The difference was not altogether of nature, however; the repression and reserve of the older sister represented a maturity of experience beyond her years.

No one at The Castle knew more than Doctor Goodman about these two sisters; and all that he knew was that the older sister had been recommended by the Superintendent of the Nurses' Training School as the most capable executive of her acquaintance, and that when he had engaged her she had asked that her sister also be employed. In the few weeks which they had served their superiority had been manifest at every turn; never in the history of the institution had it been so well handled and any wonder there might have been as to the previous history of the two girls was shouldered aside by their remarkable capability. They made friends at once with the other nurses, were well received by them, and conducted themselves in such a sane, friendly, and capable manner that no one cared for any inquiries as to antecedents.

The Reverend Milton Stroud had an unusually good opportunity to observe and meditate upon the respective merits of these sisters and also the other nurses, for much to his surprise and rather to his indignation—since he felt that his time was short and his cure must be quick—he was classified as a bed patient and found himself obliged to lie there patiently and be waited upon. But after the first flush of indignation and chagrin he was compelled to admit that it did feel fine to have a chance really to rest. He lay on a pleasant open porch with the breeze sweeping freely around him and breathed the sweet air into his lungs and felt its beneficial influence in every cell of his body. When he wanted anything a call-bell at the end of a long cord needed but a slight pressure. It certainly was delightful ease.

" Kep' ye in bed, did they? " remarked the doctor as he sat down by the bedside. " They're boun' to have their own way, them gels. But ye know right well ye've no business usin' up yore strength trapseing around when a fever's burnin' ye up. I don't need tell ye that. Ye know that much. It's jest the same way 'bout workin' yore mind, ye understan' me. It's got to rest while fever's a-goin'. A fever ain't nothin' to be so awful alarmed 'bout. It just means nature's a-fightin'. But ye shorely don't want to give yore body a lot of other things to hold it down while it's got such a fight on. Ye want to rest."

"I spent a good deal of time resting before I came here, Doctor."

"An' it done ye good, no doubt. Yo're quite sure it was restin'? So many folks doesn't know how, ye understan' me. They think they're restin' 'cause they're layin' down to do their worryin'. 'Tain't no better 'n standin' up at it."

"A person with an active mind has to think, Doctor. Sometimes worrying things will creep into your thoughts in spite of you."

"Depends a lot on whether they knows they're goin' to be welcome. It ain't no way to rest the mind."

"It's easier for some people to rest their minds than for others, Doctor."

"Meaning as some of us has so little that it's easy looked arter," shrewdly guessed the old man. "Don't make no mistake 'bout it, son. The humble man with his dull mind feels his simple griefs an' disappointments jest as keen as you men whose minds is big enough to grapple with the tremendous problems of the whole world."

"I didn't mean to say that my thoughts were so much more important than those of other people."

"No, I don't reckon ye meant to say it, but you natchully think it. These men whose minds don't go no further 'n their own little ambitions an' the affairs of their own poor famblies and ordinary friends, how should their anxieties be compared with those of a man as reaches clear out to the needs o' the whole world? But their things is all they got, an' all they got is jest as important to them as all you got is to you, ye understan' me."

"I understand readily enough, Doctor. My affairs must wait just as their affairs must wait. I will try to be sensible. I am here to get better. I have a month's vacation, anyway, and I think one more month with that should about straighten me up. During that time I will drop all affairs of my own, of my church, of the world's need, everything but getting well."

"It does sound like that ought to make a well man of ye, don't it?" the doctor asked mildly. "Two whole months doin' nothin' at all but get well! It ought to 'mount to somethin'."

"I think it should for a man who has been as sound and strong as I, heretofore."

"Well, son, it's all right. It's doin' fine. But don't be too strict 'bout the time limit. Ye dassent noways tell A'mighty God that ye give Him jes' so long. Better let Him say, ye understan' me."

The old doctor's smile as he left was so very positive that argument or dispute would have been rude; but yet the Reverend Milton Stroud had his own thoughts about how much time he would spare from his great task of regenerating Chicago.

His thoughts turned to the lighter and more pleasing subject of the personality of the sisters who were to be agents in his well-being and well-getting. Striking girls beyond a doubt. The younger with her dainty beauty was of course the prettier, but it was the elder who haunted his thought. Somewhere, six years ago, she had heard him preach, and it was outside of his church. His engagements had not been so very numerous that first year. He began an attempt to recall his outside appointments wondering which could have been the one. It was an odd thing for her to say "Only a common idler!" But women often said odd things to ministers. Perhaps she had then been unregenerate and possibly he might venture to hope that some words of his had helped her. He had delivered one address at the Presbyterian Hospital to the graduating nurses. It had not been a very serious address—rather showy, perhaps—but how glorious a thing if it had led this remarkable creature to the light. That certainly must have been the occasion, for he had scarcely been out of his own neighbourhood else, excepting the nights he had preached to the poor wretches at the Salvation Army Home.

Along the walk from the large building came a light step and a light voice singing heedlessly the words of a song, very popular on Chicago streets a short time ago. His door swung open and Gladys Standlaws appeared.

She held a thermometer in her hand. "Open your mouth and shut your eyes," she quoted. "It is time to take your temperature. Oh, did you hear that silly thing I was singing?"

His lips being firmly set around the little glass tube, he nodded his head in assent.

"Sister Mary says I disgrace the institution singing such things, but I really don't mean to. I just sing them because they are so silly they amuse me. I don't believe they do any harm to any one, do you? You can't say anything about it now, anyway."

He nodded his head vehemently.

"You mean you disapprove. Very well, I won't sing any more—not that song, anyway."

She withdrew the thermometer and scanned the little tube closely.

"How am I to-day. How is my temperature?" he asked.

"It is all right. Just about what might be expected."

"But what does the thermometer say?"

"You shouldn't ask that, you know. I assure you it is not high."

"But can't you give me a direct answer?"

"Not to that question. It is against the rules."

"The rules are foolish. It does me a great deal more harm to be told that I must not know than it would to be told that I have a high fever."

"You think so no doubt, but that is not really so. Your temperature is not your business at all. It is the doctor's business. You forget about it now, please. If the doctor came in now he would think my singing had upset you. Look pleasant, please. Tell me a song that is really good to sing."

"Do you treat all of your patients like children?"

"We try to. Doctor says that is the best way. You can do something with 'em then, he says."

"I suppose there is nothing to do about it?"

"Yes, you can get well and get up and dress and go to town and buy a thermometer of your own, or you can ask the doctor and he will tell you if he thinks best. Now don't feel badly about it, please. I always make a point of having my patients look pleasant."

"I suppose it is hard for them to do anything else." He smiled at last.

"There, that's nice. Now I'll go while you hold on to that look."

She left him to his reflections. What kind of a conversation was that to have with a nurse? Well, why not? It was fine to find a woman bright enough to break away from that "Yes, sir" and "No, sir," the stock remarks of the ordinary nurse. There she was now—talking to some one on the walk outside. He listened.

"No, Miss Jolley. I'm afraid you can't see him, for he isn't able to be up yet, and, you know, visiting bed patients is against the rules."

"You don't reckon he'd get any harm from me, Miss Gladys, just for a minute. I should guarantee!"

"Is he an old friend, Miss Jolley? Perhaps Doctor would allow you to see him if he is."

"Not generally speaking he isn't, perhaps. But I just heard he's from my own town."

"He's from Chicago, if that's your town, Miss Jolley. You have a host of friends figuring that way."

"Well, I'm proud to have 'em. Everybody from Chicago is a friend of mine. And this man—honest, I saved his life. Kept him from starvation the very first thing, I guarantee. And you've hid him up so I haven't saw him since."

"Well, I'll tell Doctor you particularly want to visit this gentleman," there was mischief in the tone.

"And you see what you get, Miss," laughed the cheerful voice. "I can tell worse on you, I guarantee. Say, I was just about mortified to death the other night when I stood there blattin' out about your ride with Johnny Langston. Honestly, if I'd been a youngster I'd just ha' bawled, I felt so small. You'd orter screwed my mouth up."

Stroud, listening from his bed and hearing the silvery laugh of the young girl join merrily with that of the older woman, judged that no great offence had been committed.

"Who is this Johnny Langston chap?" he wondered idly, as he lay back on his pillow.

IX

THE OTHER SISTER

YOU have, perhaps, felt the luxury of lying full length between clean sheets on a quiet, drowsy afternoon, with just enough fever in your blood to give a mild stimulation. You have realized how good to be free from responsibility, how fine to have no bothering calls or callers, how restful to be rid of all appointments. You have dozed in contentment.

But with the wearing along of the afternoon the fever has increased, as it has a way of doing. Instead of the pleasant languor comes a persistent ache; it is in your head, it is in your back, it is in your chest, it is everywhere. You are parched for a cool drink. Your pleasant thoughts of ease have changed to a dreary, undefined foreboding. If you nap a moment it is to fall into a miserable nightmare of a dream which wakens you with a shock.

Suddenly there is a quiet presence by the bed. The temperature is taken, but no flippant remarks does this attendant offer, all is quiet and calm. A firm, quick, undoubtedly practised hand adjusts your bedding. You are bathed in refreshingly cool water, and that without exertion on your part. You feel the reduction in your fever. Something cool rests lightly upon your aching head—not a caressing hand, but, far more effective, a water-coil placed by a hand you may imagine caressing.

You are refreshed; you are rested; the aching disappears; you sink into quiet repose. You have received the ministrations of a skilled nurse and so doing have profited by nature's greatest adjuvant.

It was the elder sister who cared for the Reverend Milton Stroud as night came on. It was she who refreshed him; hers the presence which soothed him and hers the presence which pervaded his dreams. He was a quick man in decision. Before he dropped soundly asleep he had quite determined, not only that he would leave the sanatorium completely cured in two months, but that Mary Standlaws should leave at the same time and change her career from institutional to private nursing.

Milton Stroud, though young, was a learned man, a man of thought and purpose, yet withal one quite susceptible to the charm of the bright side of life. He was old enough to know that it is not good for a man to dwell alone. He had considered the subject of matrimony many times—he had also many times considered certain subjects for matrimony. Always he had felt that some greater, more compelling force must come to him. And since reaching this institution and a sense of his weakness it had come—his whole soul and body clamoured for a helpmate. Only a few hours ago he had felt how precious would be the bright fellowship of one so light-hearted and happy as his attendant of the morning.

This evening he knew that his morning thoughts were mistaken, for Mary had soothed his aching and distress.

X

MILTON STROUD MAKES HIS CHOICE

EXCEPTIONAL is the man who knows exactly why he desires a certain woman to be to him a wife. He wants her because he wants her, and that is the extent of his philosophy. Usually he is quite willing to admit that she is too good for him—otherwise he would not want her, for almost every man, willing though he may be, in a general way, to admit his deficiencies, considers himself entitled to take to wife some superior creature with wings—potential if not perceptible. Momentous though this great decision is, even a sick man may feel his judgment quite equal to it, so it is not surprising that Milton Stroud, who was not so very ill, was very positive. At times a man will make a decision more positively in sickness than in health, being shorn of extraneous matters that might confuse his judgment.

Having definitely made his decision the logical order of procedure is to communicate the fact to the lady of choice; but the wily suitor, no doubt realizing that his uncouth if not repellent person will not be immediately acceptable, begins a course of ingratiation known as "love-making," with the thought that when the lady has in some measure become reconciled to his person he will acquaint her with the honour in store for her. And so artful does he believe his advances to be and so clever does he consider his processes that he would be quite surprised to know that the fair one has understood his aspirations ever since they were definitely set.

So with Milton Stroud and so with Mary Standlaws. She had not long officiated as nurse to the young minister before she knew what was in his mind. Was she surprised? So much was he in her thoughts that it scarcely seemed possible to surprise her. And gratified? Gratified indeed, for if he considered his nurse a comforter and a tower of strength, she had long ago sanctified in her heart the man who had spoken the momentous words which led her into the Way of Life. Women do not necessarily love saints, save when the saint is of their own canonizing. This man, weak and worn and ill, was in her heart the greatest man living and by all means the most desirable. But he was not for her. There were obstacles which she felt to be insuperable.

The most potent factor in matchmaking is a clever woman who greatly admires a man whom she herself may not marry. Given this factor, and add to it a second woman to whom number one is sufficiently devoted to be willing to sacrifice her best, and a match is inevitable. Since Mary Standlaws could not marry the Reverend Milton Stroud the sweetest alternative that lightened her imagination was to give this great, incomparable happiness to one whom she loved better than herself—her fairy sister Gladys. Not all sisters are on such terms of absolute confidence that they can guarantee the action one of another. But so close was the tie between these two that Mary felt herself empowered to choose for the younger sister, and had not a doubt that her choice would be ratified.

Mary waited a few days before telling Gladys her thoughts. But certain aggressive actions on the part of one John Calhoun Langston warned her that her communication must not be long deferred. So she chose the opportunity that came in a few minutes' outing one lovely evening when they had strolled down the driveway and sat on a rustic seat by the massive front gates—gates whose function was purely ornamental, for they barred no one out and kept no one in.

"Isn't it just grand this evening!" exclaimed Gladys. "I love this place already. I am absolutely so happy I'm afraid of myself."

"It's quiet and it's peaceful," Mary agreed. "After the things we've been through in the last few years it seems almost like home. I suppose that's why you're so happy—unless there's something or some one else?"

"Mary Standlaws, what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, I hope. I was just wondering though. This happy feeling of yours reminds me a little——"

"Now, that'll do, sister Mary. Do you think you see a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand?"

"Or a man's two hands, say. I hope not. I'm just wondering."

"Well, you may continue to wonder."

"But there isn't any need, is there, Gladys? You don't really like this Mister Longhorn or Longjohn or whatever his name is?"

"You know perfectly well how to pronounce Mr. Langston's name and you are just saying things, Mary."

"Well, he worries me. I don't deny his virtues but I don't want him coming after you."

"You fret too much, my sister. You worry needlessly. I don't care for him and he doesn't care for me. He's nice to me just as I suppose he is to every other girl he meets."

"I knew that was it, dear. I think Mr. Langston must be a very nice young man—Doctor thinks so much of him—but the man for my little sister must be more than an ordinary man."

"Perhaps you'll never find him," said Gladys, with mischief.

"Perhaps I have found him already," returned Mary.

"Why, Mary, whatever do you mean?"

"I mean that there is one man—just one man—to whom I feel that I could trust you."

"Oh, where is this remarkable person to be found?" cried Gladys, in mock anxiety.

"He is here, Gladys."

"One of our patients?"

"One of our patients!"

"Then I know just who this paragon is to whom you are so willing to sign me over. It is Mr. Stroud."

"Yes, it is Mr. Stroud."

"Well, Mary Standlaws! I do hope you haven't yet arranged for the ceremony."

"Not yet; you shall do that yourself. You don't know who he is, Gladys. You won't wonder that I think him so great a man, when I tell you."

"Well, tell me, quickly."

"You remember father's last day on earth, Gladys; that wonderful day?"

"I remember what you told me about it when I came home."

"You remember that the words of the minister brought him such great peace, even though they stirred him to declare that he must go over his business affairs and make restitution to hundreds of people."

"I know you so expressed your belief."

"Yes, dear, because I am so sure. Well, Mr. Stroud is the minister!"

"I guessed it as soon as you spoke," said Gladys. "But it doesn't mean the same to me as to you. It never has. All that I know is that father died, and that we were left absolutely penniless. If Mr. Stroud was responsible, it doesn't make me feel any better to him."

"That's because you weren't there, Gladys. I would give anything that you might have a vision of father in those last few hours; so joyous, so radiant, so full of plans for the future; all the old moodiness and black doubt that had weighed him down so long vanished away. Just a few hours, but they were worth a lifetime!"

"It was your vision, Mary, not mine. Why don't you marry Mr. Stroud yourself?"

"I would rather than any man I know. But my vision is the very reason why I must not. Cannot a woman be so firm to her purpose that she can deny herself such fancies? You know what I have said my life shall be, Gladys."

There was a note of reproach in the words.

"Yes; but I don't see what good it will do, nor why you could not fulfil the same purpose if married."

"You will see if you think. You know that father hoped to give his fortune back to the poor, from whom most of it came. I was willing and you would have been willing, and we were the only ones concerned. When he was so suddenly taken I supposed that we would carry out his plans. Then Mr. Doane managed to show that father had assigned all of his share of the business to him and that the income ceased with his death, so that we had nothing to give to any one——"

"And then," interrupted Gladys, "my heroic big sister must vow that at least she would give her life to the poor, the sick, and the suffering."

"And you pretend to say this could be done just as well if I married! A little thought will tell you, as it has told people in all ages, that a life vowed to the service of humanity must be a life which sacrifices the ties of marriage and home."

"But a preacher's wife, Mary! Isn't that a life of sufficient sacrifice for any one?"

"Not this preacher, at least. But don't joke, dear. This thing is more than a whim of mine. It is the only possible way in which I can in the least degree make the restitution that dear father was so anxious for. It is a sacred thing.

"Of course, dear," she continued, after a moment of silence, "I don't expect you to marry Mr. Stroud unless you should fall in love with each other, but I'm sure you can afford to give him as much chance as Mr. Langston. And, perhaps, if you give him a little attention, he won't bother about your big sister."

"I will save you, big sister. I will at least do that much. He shall be so interested in me that he will not throw a single glance after you. One sister should be plenty."

"But, Gladys; you won't trifle with him?"

"Whoever hinted at such a thing? I hope no nurse in The Castle would act so with a patient."

But in spite of her gaiety, the little sister was frightened. It is one thing to talk cheerfully of what you will do when the doing seems impossibly remote, and another to glimpse it as an impending reality.

And she was not wholly ready to dismiss all others from her thoughts, for while true enough that Johnny Langston had never breathed a word, there is an atmosphere which invades the soul, needing no words or signs. So she added:

"But you don't think he really wants to marry any one, Mary?"

"Probably not just now, dear," Mary agreed. "I simply give you my permission to fall in love with him if you so desire. For me, at present my work lies in this institution. I wish I might give the old doctor some of the wealth we once had. It would pay for these charity cases that quack doctor at New Hope sends up here. I would like to shake that man. I have made up my mind that not another single one of his cast-off patients will I admit."

XI

"MILLIONS OF DOLLARS LEFT TO YOU!"

IT seemed very evident from the convictions she expressed that whoever might add to the charity cases that already overburdened The Castle would get little encouragement or support from its head nurse. Certainly this was a logical conclusion and the only one to draw from her remarks. But why refer to logical conclusions—the head nurse was a woman! Her heart was much softer than her head, yet much more potent in deciding her conduct.

Miss Mary Standlaws always gazed at the sanatorium known as New Hope with absorbing interest when in its neighbourhood. She looked at it much as a child might gaze at the Ogre's castle with a terrified hope that mayhap the monster himself may look out of a window or step for a moment to the door. Never yet had the Ogre appeared; perhaps he did not desire a "shaking." But on this particular day she did see an object of very great interest in reward for her gazing. A woman, recently come from the train, hesitated a moment at the door and then suddenly pushed on in. She was so evidently in poverty, spite of her shabby finery, that the nurse stood staring in greatly interested curiosity. How long would it take them to refer her to The Castle of Cheer?

Quick work, very quick work, indeed. While she still gazed and wondered, the poor creature, despondency in every motion, came forth dejectedly and crawled down the hot street as if ready to sink beneath the heat of the day and the burden of her soul. Crossing over, she came directly in the path of Mary Standlaws, who still gazed as one fascinated.

Now was her time to move hurriedly along—this very minute, before this poor creature should have an opportunity to make an appeal which might touch her sympathies. But, easily stirred, they had been touched from the first moment. Every atom of her nursing instinct cried out for an opportunity to take this shattered wreck and rebuild her into a human being. She was also stirred by an indefinite feeling of some vague connection in the long-distant past—the years of long ago.

"Why did you not stay?" She asked the question without preface or apology, for the situation to her seemed obvious. "Wouldn't the doctor take you?"

The woman laughed a dry, bitter laugh.

"The doctor," she exclaimed. "I didn't get within seeing distance of the doctor. I hadn't more than stepped inside before up jumps a young fellow and asks my business. But he don't even listen to the line of talk I try to put up, before he says, 'We're quite full up now. I'll register you and you can see the doctor later. The advance fee is two hundred dollars.' All I could say about paying a little later didn't make no hit with him at all. It was me for the door, right sudden."

"Didn't he give any reason at all—just turn you off because you hadn't the money?"

"You never spoke a truer word. He had a line o' talk he tried to string me with, of course. 'We're so full,' says he, 'that we're just taking the cases that need our treatment worst. What you need most is fresh air and good food. There's a place up the road a piece, called The Castle, that's what you want.' "

"And so you are going to The Castle?"

"Not me, I ain't. I'm going to the station to wait till the next train back. I come to this place to get cured by the stuff advertised in the papers. I don't know nothing of no Castle."

Splendid opportunity here, for this inflexible head nurse. Just let this woman go to the station and back where she came from.

"I think The Castle has an empty bed. Their carriage is just down the street standing in front of that big building they call The Inn. You go along and tell the driver you want to go out." This was the way she used her opportunity.

"But I can't no more pay them Castle people than I could the others."

"I think I know some one who will pay for your actual expense. You go along to the carriage."

She did not say that the "some one" was a nurse whose head was harder than her heart. Let it be distinctly understood that Mary Standlaws at this time had no more than the most vague idea that she was bringing to The Castle any one of the least importance to her own interests. Something was struggling to revive old memories, but she felt no more definitely that her act of mercy was to result to her great interest than the proprietor of New Hope felt that his act of calculating business was to result in his undoing. In the late afternoon the weary stranger rode between the invitingly open gates and entered The Castle of Cheer.

It was quite dark in the little cottage where the new patient, bathed, clothed in a clean gown, and lying in the luxury of fresh, cool sheets had been made more comfortable than she had been in any late experience. She lay quiet but not asleep. The shadows of the room carried no terrors for her, but the active brain never ceased its agitated stirring and scheming over the events which the day had stirred up. A wonderful day! Perhaps the beginning of health. But, strange that it should be so, the thing which most excited her was the hope that it meant beginning wealth. Something had come to her that day which she hoped to turn to material gain.

Suddenly she was conscious of a presence in the room. Her alert, overstrung nerves, responsive to the slightest sound, told her at once where was the intruder. The presence neared her bed and she felt a cool hand on her forehead.

" Don't be alarmed," said the quiet voice of Mary Standlaws. " We don't need lights to talk, and we are less likely to be disturbed if they are not on. Tell me if I have not seen you before? Perhaps I am mistaken. You do not now look at all like the person I mean. I saw her but once and that over six years ago; and yet something about you reminds me of her so strongly that I am bound to ask you my question. If you are the one, I think you will remember me, for I have not greatly changed."

The woman did not reply at once.

" I know you now," she admitted, " but I didn't know you at first. And I don't see how you can see in the poor wretch you picked up this afternoon any likeness to what I was six years ago. Why, that day when I come to see you and tell you that if young Doctor Doane was pretending to be engaged to you he had no right, me being his lawful wife, I was pretty enough to be the wife of any man. Now I'm a wreck, and you, who was a rich young lady, is a nurse in a hospital."

"Yes, you were a pretty woman. But there is a likeness yet, and everything of that terrible day is stamped into my memory."

"Well, don't take on about it. God knows he wasn't much to lose. But do you know why I come here to-day? They told me he was the doctor running that New Hope."

"That must be a mistake, Mrs. Doane. The doctor who runs that is a quack named Middane."

"I'd know well it was a mistake, seeing you here and him doing nothing about it. He's hunted for you all over this country."

"Why should he hunt for me? I have no interest in him nor he in me."

"You don't mean to tell me that you don't know anything about the old gentleman's will?"

"About his father's. I didn't know old Mr. Doane was dead."

"No wonder nobody could find you. You must have been shut up in a convent. The papers was full of it. Anybody as wasn't dead to the world was bound to hear of it."

"My sister and I were dead to the world, as you put it. When father died we were left almost penniless. There were no relatives to whom we could go; we had few friends. Gladys was at school in France and I went there to her. We decided to take up nursing as a vocation. We took our mother's name, entered a French hospital, and for four years we were indeed dead to the world."

"And I'm the first one to tell you that you've had millions of dollars left to you. Before old Mr. Doane died, nearly three years ago, he gave it out that he didn't feel just right about the way he had treated your paw, and he left you all the estate. He had found out how wild Vance had been going and he didn't so much as leave him a cent. All the property of every kind is to go to you, but he takes care of Vance by saying in the will that you must marry him in three years."

"Mrs. Doane! Mrs. Doane! what are you telling me?"

"I'm telling you gospel truth, Miss Mary. It's just exactly as I say. All the property of every kind goes to you and all you have to do is to marry Vance Doane."

"Then it doesn't go to me at all. If Vance was your husband six years ago, he is now."

"Nobody knows, Miss Mary. All I want is a little out of all that money. How much will you give me just to disappear?"

"I will give you nothing. You don't know what you propose. And I wouldn't marry Vance Doane for all the millions in the world!"

"But I've heard tell how your paw intended to give all this money back. Vance told me years ago. He allowed you'd be crazy to do the same way. Don't you want to?"

"Not at such a price. You do not know what you speak about when you make such a proposal. The money must go to whomever it will. Does Vance get it when the forfeit time is up?"

"No. If you don't get married you don't either of you get it. At the end of three years it goes to a kind of committee of three men the old gentleman knew pretty well, for them to do something with. They are all officers of a society for exploring South America, so I suppose it'll go to pay for explorers."

"It certainly will so far as I am concerned," emphatically asserted Mary Standlaws.

"Well, if you feel that way about it. But you certainly beat my time. You think it over some. There's millions in it. Probably Vance would be willing to take his half, once you was married, and never see you again, rather than lose it all."

"I have said my final word on the subject. Let me ask you, Mrs. Doane, can you not drop this and never speak of it again? Give your attention now to getting back your health."

"Well, I certainly would like to be well again. But a million dollars would reconcile me a lot to being sick. Howsomdever it ain't my money. Don't call me Mrs. Doane, please. Put me down as Mrs. Smith and do your best for me and I'll do the best I know. But, say! You think it over about this money. It's an awful pile of cash to turn down."

"Would you go back to him for it?"

"Me! Would I? Him that's beat me and deserted me and cursed me. Would I go back to him for the money? Let me tell you, dearie; I'm just a fool—a plumb fool. I'd go back to him without a solitary red cent. That's how much of a fool I am!"

And the woman's face was wet with sudden tears.

XII

THE BIRD WITH THE BROKEN PINION

IT is a great thing to be the possessor of riches. It is greater to be superior to such possessions—to have riches in your reach, yet put forth no grasping hand. Try to imagine yourself almost in possession of some unthinkable sum (never mind the amount, your bait may be a few dollars or a few millions, depending altogether on what you already have), the only bar being some little matter of conscience. See yourself at first push the vile temptation indignantly away, nobility of purpose in your thrust—a little later see yourself inclined to look more closely at the bar—later yet, you have discovered that it is not a bar, after all. No bar! Then the money is honestly yours. Another victory for honesty!

It may be as well to state that Mary Standlaws felt no temptation whatever to bribe the woman to disappear so that she might come back into possession of her one-time sweetheart, Vance Doane, and the immense fortune attached to him. There might have been some struggle had the human attraction been as great as in former years, but Vance Doane had perished in her regard years ago. Yet the revival of old recollections saddened her. But she mourned because of the thoughts they brought of her dead father and his noble purpose, which, but for this requirement—so simple to the maker but to her so insuperable—she might now have the opportunity to carry out. She wanted to know more of the will and was just as naturally curious as any young woman would have been to know what became of the wealth if she did not claim it. So she did a thing rather indiscreet for a young person in hiding; she wrote a letter to the clerk of the court asking for a copy of the will.

Though Mary made this little concession to the curiosity of her sex and her natural desire for good things, she had no serious thought of coming into great possessions nor was she wildly elated or even joyously happy at the possibilities which the strange woman had revealed. Quite the reverse; old wounds bled anew; gloom which had been defeated years ago again attacked her; her sleep was disturbed by restless dreams of great distress; her peace was shattered.

Keeping trouble to ourselves is a favourite occupation with some of us, and we cherish tenderly the consolation of our bravery and revel in the thought that no other life is shadowed by the cloud which obscures our sun. It is a brave idea but not wholly a true one. Our mates all feel the difference between forced gaiety and lightsome fun; every one detects the heavy footfall where usually the light step trips along; every ear with a musical note knows when the cheer of life in our song gives place to the dirge of gloom. Keeping trouble to ourselves is not so easy, for trouble knows no boundaries and, like a malignant infection, spreads although not seen.

Mary Standlaws' trouble, bravely concealed though it was, shed a vague depression over many of the inmates and attachés of The Castle. In an institution of this character there is necessarily much that is routine and routine is always monotonous. The same people with the same ailments, wearing much the same clothing, thinking much the same thoughts, and saying much the same things meet day after day under the same conditions. One of The Castle's strongest characteristics was a spirit cheerful enough to overcome this dull monotony, and Mary had been one of the foremost agents in its promotion.

It was Sunday afternoon. Bissington Jones felt the monotony as much as any one. He was a good-hearted man and always ready to second any attempt to cheer, but no attempt was there to second. He decided to call on the Reverend Milton Stroud. He had been interested in him from the start, when he had welcomed him to the Chaser's Club and given him into the care of Miss Jolley. It was necessary to get special permission to call on a bed patient, but he had such a reputation for cheer that it was readily granted.

" When are they going to let me up ? " asked Stroud.

" When they get ready," said Bissington, cheerfully. " They kept me in bed six weeks when I came here."

" And you don't look as if there was ever anything the matter with you ? "

" No, and I didn't then. That's one thing got me in such poor shape. Everybody would say, ' There can't be much the matter with a man as fat as you.' It struck them as quite a joke when a good doctor said at last that I had consumption. The idea of a fat man being a consumptive ! "

" I suppose you wouldn't be wasting your time here if it wasn't so, but it isn't exactly in keeping with accepted ideas."

" Accepted ideas don't count so much against facts. But I'm getting better. Doctor Goodman says another six months will likely put me in shape to get back to work."

"Six months! Poor man, I don't see how you bear the thought."

"I spoke like that to old Doc once. 'How old are you?' he asked. I told him I was thirty-six. 'Add a year to that an' you'll be thirty-seven,' he said. 'That gives you over thirty years before you reach your Bible limit.' I told him that might be true enough but it didn't make the time seem any shorter. 'Don't it?' he says. 'But if you remember that in this little bit of time you're trying to make your body fit to live another thirty years and your soul fit to live for all eternity, it won't seem so awful long.'"

"He's a good old man," said the preacher. "He has told me a great deal of truth, already."

"He can do it," corroborated Bissington Jones.

"I believe I'm to be allowed up next week. I shall certainly be glad to be out again. But I've got to admit one thing. After the resting is fairly begun a man begins to see things in their right proportions and some matters that seemed terribly important become nothing at all. The old doctor's theory is all right. There is a great deal in getting a right point of view."

"I'll be glad to have you out. I'll show you the place. Anything I can do for you now?"

"I believe not. I suppose you have some kind of Sunday service but I don't expect to take in Sunday services for a time. I heard some one singing the other day—a real singer. If you have singers to spare you might bring them this way."

"We generally have a sing Sunday afternoons. The old doctor always likes us to have it. We don't sing grand opera much, though we did have a singer of some fame recently. But we mostly like the familiar songs and hymns that mean something to us. People shut away from life's activities as we are have a tenderness for the old favourites. I'll get the singers together where you can hear."

It was almost surprising to Jones himself, sometimes, to find how readily he exercised himself to humour other people's whims. When he entered the institution he had been a self-centred, cynical, ambitious, but disappointed man, disappointed because just at the stage of genuine achievement in his profession, just when his efforts were commanding both respect and money, he was obliged to halt in his career, perhaps to abandon it altogether. And now, with an adjusted viewpoint, he found himself looking out upon a larger life and a more satisfactory than he had ever contemplated.

The people, the singers and listeners, were easily gathered. Any form of diversion was welcome. The old doctor moved among the groups seated about the lawn in chairs, settees, or squatting directly on the grassy sod, and manifested his approval in smiling encouragement. These were precious times to him. If there was any lack of subject for their song he was always ready with a suggestion. His taste was quite catholic but he had his favourites which he demanded —usually hymns. "One sweetly solemn thought" was one of his surest selections; "Beneath the cross of Jesus" was another. "O'er the hills the sun is setting" was a great favourite, and often, as they sang the significant words, "I am one day nearer home," tears would fill his eyes and roll down the furrows of his weather-worn cheeks. Not that it had any sadness for him. It was a song of rejoicing. "I am one day nearer home" meant friends on ahead, a work well done, a look into the face of the Lord he had followed faithfully, something that was indeed "Sweet to know at even."

The singing was well on in its course, almost sung out, in fact, when the two sisters appeared from their duties.

"We will now have a song from Miss Standlaws," announced Jones, without consultation.

A great clamour advertised the popular approval of the announcement.

"You sing, Gladys," whispered the head nurse, gently pushing the younger girl forward.

But Gladys for once was shy and restrained. These people were all her friends—there was not a harsh critic among them. But they were mostly city people—they had heard great singers—they would laugh at her feeble effort. She looked at the crowd, she looked despairingly at Mary. She was almost ready to run, but some one handed her a sheet of music. It was "The Bird with the Broken Pinion." She could sing that, at least. Faintly her sweet young voice rose in harmony with the accompaniment; but her composure did not return. She did not gather strength, terror was manifest in every quavering note, another moment and she must collapse. Her sympathetic audience drooped its united gaze that it might not see her embarrassment. Quietly another note stole into the song, another voice, dominant rather than supporting took up the melody. She was carried along like a singer in a chorus who follows the master voice. How the words rang now; what an intensity of meaning they carried! People forgot to look for the new singer so engrossed were they in the song. Triumphant? No, let it rather be sad. But how vibrant. With what pathos did this new voice ring. One could see that poor, fluttering, striving thing, vainly shaking its wings as the song told that it "never soared so high again." One could hear sentence passed on a doomed sinner as the low, closing tones proclaimed this also true of "the soul that sin had stricken." The sisters hurried away as the song was finished. The singing was over, for no one cared to offer further contributions.

"That is a voice!" said Bissington Jones. "That woman is an artist. Instead of being in nurse's uniform she should be singing in grand opera."

"That song came clear from the soul, I guarantee," said little Miss Jolley. "It beats me what she knows about a broken pinion."

The Reverend Milton Stroud dropped back from the tension of his listening.

"She has lived that song," he said. "But it must surely be that so sweet a woman has lived it for some one else."

XIII

DOC GIVES A "PERSCRIPTION"

BISSINGTON JONES devoutly thanked his Creator that he was a married man.

"If I were not," he remarked to his friend Cassius Banks, "the Lord only knows what kind or how many kinds of fool I'd be making of myself. I'm here to make the cure and to make it good. What kind of results could I expect if I were chasing my constitution off its feet making love to a nurse?"

"I don't know," admitted Cass. "Which nurse?"

"That's just it," Jones continued. "How could any one tell in this institution? Those two sisters are enough to distract any kind of a man. When life seems real, life seems earnest, any fellow might be sure that our head nurse is just the one to pull him along to the crest of the wave; when joy and happiness abide he's bound to think how delightfully the younger one would figure as a stockholder and director."

"Well, you don't have to worry about it," advised Cassius, with perhaps a trifle more emphasis than seemed absolutely necessary. "It ought not to make your temperature chart show any zigzag tracings. Why be anxious?"

"I am not anxious. I do not allow myself to be anxious. Anxiety retards the cure. Although I look fat, appearances are deceptive. However, I weighed a hundred and eighty-two yesterday. It will be many a long day before that preacher Stroud weighs a hundred and eighty-two, the pace he's going."

"So it's Stroud is on your mind, is it? I hadn't noticed him. He's only been allowed up a few days, has he?"

"Is it Mr. Stroud you speak of?" asked a pleasant voice, as Miss Jolley stepped in front of them. "He has been up a week, and isn't he the dearest man?"

"Why this hasty transfer of affections, Miss Jolley?" objected Jones, gallantly. "Think how you harrow the feelings of my friend Cassius, not to mention my own secret yearnings."

"That's enough for you, Mr. Jones," Miss Jolley checked him abruptly. "I heard you men talking about the nurses and what you said about Reverend Stroud and our darling sisters. You're foolish."

"Agreed," said Bissington Jones. "We are properly rebuked."

"You are foolish because you can't see. It takes a woman, I guarantee. I could tell you all about it, only I won't betray them of my own sect."

"But you will tell us in the interest of humanity, Miss Jolley. Think how much help we can give if we know just what word to pass to Stroud at the right moment."

"You're right, you could. He's foolish, too; if he is a dear. He thinks it's the little one he wants and it ain't a bit. If the older sister as much as crooked her finger at him he'd know at once, I guarantee."

"And why doesn't the older sister crook her finger?"

"That's one of the things I can't just tell. Gladys doesn't want him; that's clear to any woman, and we know why, too."

"Perhaps they aren't ready for any crooked work, yet," put in Cassius.

"That's a slam at the whole sect an' I'll tell ye no more," said Miss Jolley. "Whatever we do for Reverend Stroud will be for his best good, be sure o' that. An' we'll do it, too, when we get ready. He's a dear man an' a minister at that. An' he and I are from the very same little place. Honest, we are."

"Thought you were from Chicago?" said Cassius.

"We are," she calmly assured him. "Ain't it strange that kindred souls should dwell so near an' yet so far? Scarcely an hour's ride on the elevated between my home and his church, an' yet we had to have this hospital built and both of us get teabeery before ever we could get acquainted."

"Quite a unique way you have of mentioning our mutual enemy, T. B., Miss Jolley. Do you think Mr. Stroud also finds his visit made more pleasant by the new acquaintances he makes?"

"He will before he's through, I guarantee. I can see how things are going to break for him right now."

"Woman's marvellous instinct!" exclaimed Bissington Jones as she moved away. "She may know all about it, but to any one else it's a question which one is the choice."

It was true that this was a question which the Reverend Milton himself would have found some difficulty in answering. The head nurse, truly a majestic creature of admirable poise, capable, efficient, commanding, fit queen for any court, was after all not very approachable, but the fairy sister, bright and gay, charming and tender, seemed quite often to be in a mood when a woodland sprite might offer his advances, if not a human being. Did he desire a queen or did he desire a fairy? He solved the question by declaring for a fairy queen.

It is well understood that nurses at hospitals and institutions are expressly forbidden to encourage attentions from patients. Perhaps this is the explanation of the large crop of weddings which is such a constant drain upon the working-staff of so many hospitals. The nurse probably concludes that since she may not encourage her admirer's attentions while on duty, the best plan is to put an end to duty—since she may not receive his offers of devotion at the hospital, go with him away from it.

The nurses at The Castle were fully informed as to these unwritten rules. But what are rules, written or unexpressed, printed on a placard and framed beneath glass or merely understood; what are rules when the thing they are to regulate is that intangible sentiment which flows from male to mate and is understood and fully expressed without needing so much as the touch of a hand, whose language is not words but tones, whose vision is not sight but perception? The Reverend Milton Stroud was a little doubtful about Mary but he felt quite sure of Gladys. He was an honourable man and already began to feel that, after all, perhaps Gladys was destiny.

Old Doc Williams was not of a suspicious nature—far be it from him to suspect one of his nurses of anything unseemly—but he had so much of childlike vision that he saw things that were hid from keener eyes—so much of childlike sympathy that he was constantly told things that were kept from sharper minds. He enjoyed the conversation of the Reverend Milton Stroud, and now that the gentleman was at last allowed to be up a great portion of the day, they were much together. The doctor volunteered an original prescription for the young minister, and perhaps he knew when he offered it that it was one of the things that was in the young man's heart.

"When ye go back to that hard work, fust thing ye do, git a helper, ye understan' me. Don't try a-bearin' all them burdens alone."

"You know I have an assistant," observed the minister.

"Yes, an' you know that ain't what I mean," said the doctor.

The young man smiled and even blushed.

"I suppose you mean get a wife. I thought you doctors didn't advise people with tuberculosis to get married."

"I ain't enough of a scientific doctor to be real sure of what we do advise. I don't suppose no doctor advises people with tuberculosis to git married, ye understan' me. But they is such a thing as gettin' over it, or we wouldn't be runnin' this yere place."

"You feel pretty sure I will get over it, don't you, Doctor?"

"I'm callatin' on it. We're all figurin' a heap on you gettin' along all right."

"And then you think I could marry?"

"I ain't settin' up as no authority, but here's the way I think 'bout that. They's a awful lot o' consumptives in this world, ye understan' me. 'Pears like a good many of 'em must a-took it from their fathers an' mothers. But a lot o' real clever doctors, like them as my boy Davy is workin' with acrost the water, they say as if the fathers an' mothers was careful the children needn't never took it. They wasn't borned with it, ye understan' me. They just took it."

"I've heard that such was the case. It does make things better."

"Well, here's your own case, for instance. I been runnin' this place quite a whiles, but I never had nobody here 'at had folks writin' to us like yore friends do. Looks like you was putty useful. What's best thing to do with ye, seein' ye've had consumption? Shall we jest shut ye up so nobody else ever c'n git it from ye? Plumb ridik'lous! We tells ye instead how to take care o' yourself so ye won't be dangerous. Shall we make a useful man like you allus look arter his lone self for fear a wife might git it f'm him? Plumb ridik'lous! Fust we cure ye well as ye can be cured, an' then ye c'n pick out a strong, hearty woman as ain't the least bit consumptive herself, an' who's goin' to say ye shan't marry her?"

"Who indeed?" murmured the young man.

"I tell ye, the way they writes, ye must be a pow'ful useful man. Shall we say as yore race must end right here for fear yore children'll be consumptive? Plumb ridik'lous. We marries ye to a hearty woman an' ye raise up childern in such a way that any consumptive tendencies they got never have no show at all, ye understan' me. Shore we expects ye to git married. More'n that, we perscribes it. An' I hope ye'll be able to git the perscription filled."

"I hope I may," agreed the Reverend Milton Stroud. "You have no one you would recommend?" he asked, artfully.

"I'd prefer not. We don't deal much in med'sins at this yere place. Most all we give is good food, quiet, rest, and fresh air. An' I don't lay no claim to knowin' much 'bout dangerous mixtures, noways. I might make a mistake an' give ye what I've heerd 'em call an incompatible, ye understan' me." The old man laughed. "Tell ye, son, ye'll jest have to go to the drug-store yoreself."

"Very well. I'll try to do my own marketing; but I expect to have it clearly understood that it is your prescription."

He began to think that he knew exactly where to take the prescription, and, so confident is that princely creature, man, it did not occur to him that any difficulty might be experienced in filling it, or that the ingredients might be too costly for his purse.

XIV

QUIET BUT VERY NICE

MR. JOHN CALHOUN LANGSTON was the junior member of the law firm of Langston and Langston, which transacted all of the very best law business of Latham Centre. It is, perhaps, only fair to say that the senior member was still very efficient and well able to represent the interests of the firm at such rather numerous times as found his son, heir, and partner engaged in business other than legal, though perhaps not illegal.

Young Mr. Langston had an infinite capacity for enjoying himself, and it is agreed that this is not so uncommon an attribute. But he also possessed the really rare trait of an infinite capacity for giving enjoyment to other people. Of late he had been ably assisted in this by his ownership of a roomy and powerful touring-car. It hummed a soothing song to itself at the door of the administration building of the sanatorium as Johnny argued his case with the old doctor.

"Ain't never been in one yet, Johnny," said the doctor. "No, I ain't feared of 'em. I rode underground in London and overhead in Chicago, an' He looked arter me both ways. But I can't say as I jest likes 'em, ye understan' me. Ye go whizzin' along an' ye can't see nothin' at all. Think o' the sensation! ye say. 'Tain't nothin' to a old man like me. I'd ruther the sensation of seein' a new flower by the side o' the road, or a bird swayin' back an' forth on the wire, or a rabbit runnin' out o' the brush. Jest feelin' the wind sweepin' my face an' gettin' a hazy blur of nothin' as my old eyes tries to take things in, ain't no sensation for me, ye understan' me. Ask this gel Gladys to go. It's her arternoon off."

Let no one think for a moment that Johnny knew that it was this gel's arternoon off and had planned for such a conclusion. But having the opportunity thus thrust upon him he allowed none of his skill in special pleading to go unused in urging the arrangement. It wasn't at all the thing for nurses to go riding in automobiles in that way, and Doctor should have known better. But we would see what sister Mary had to say. Sister Mary didn't like the arrangement at all, but it happened that she was greatly in need of some supplies from Lewistown, a rather dreary journey by train, but a delightful spin by automobile, and so, just this once, perhaps, it wouldn't matter.

Just this once! Once is plenty for Johnny Langston. Once is all that he, a man of action, has any right to ask. If there were any doubt—if there could by any possibility be the least shadow of a doubt of the inclination of his own heart, or the mighty desirability of the gracious prize that his heart covets, it might be different. But so sure is he, both of his desires and their desirability, that once is everything; he could have no use for more times than once if they were showered upon him.

There is no likelihood that the modern young man will ever find in any kind of pleasure-machine—be it aërial or earthly—the remarkable adjuvant to love-making that was enjoyed by his fathers in the days of the good old family horse and top-buggy. The automobile may be almost fool-proof, and will nearly run itself; but there was no "almost" or "nearly" about the old horse and buggy; you simply let the lines slip over the dash and turned it loose. Johnny was unusually expert in the management of the automobile, but no machine capable of sixty miles an hour may be turned loose. At least one eye must always be to the front, and at least one hand must control the wheel. When the twinkling of an eye will allow your wild, uprearing steed to leave the beaten track and rush madly on a crusade against windmills or telephone-poles as the case may be, it is best to keep one's eyes from twinkling. A vehicle of such speed that it needs only the time of a sneeze to collide with a telegraph-pole, and of such power as to make the telegraph-pole feel that it has met an irresistible force, is not to be allowed the latitude or given the confidence that we of old reposed in the old family horse.

Johnny had not anticipated doing much of anything but talking, but he had expected to do a great deal of that. Talking was the easiest thing he did and it was rare indeed that he was at any loss for a subject. He had already had the pleasure of a few conversations with Miss Gladys and they had been quite easy and natural. To-day he would be, he must be, more captivating and more convincing than ever. Knowing all this he yet found it hard to start. Gladys also seemed to feel that the situation had its delicacies and was too embarrassed to be of any help to him. Nothing that he could start induced more than monosyllabic replies.

He tried one unsuccessful subject after another. Perhaps she could talk nursing. She certainly knew the subject and he felt that he knew a little about it or at least about its practitioners.

" The career of a nurse is certainly a noble one," he explained with the magnanimity of one who makes a great concession.

" Yes," she replied.

" It seems to me that such a statement merits more than a one-syllable comment," he complained.

" What would you like me to say? "

" Oh, I don't know. We are talking about your grand and noble profession."

" Yes, I hear those adjectives used every time I attend a graduating exercise or hear a public address about nursing."

" You see, then, that the sentiment is unanimous."

" Not exactly; there are the nurses, you know."

" You mean to say they don't agree."

" I do not hear them speak much about it being grand and noble. I have heard them say it was killing hard, I have heard them say they were dead on their feet, I have heard them speak of a fat case, and I have heard them admit it was better than scrubbing; but aside from graduating exercises I haven't heard them say much about grand and noble."

" I suspect that you are squelching me, young lady. I have a feeling that I am being subdued."

" The novelty appeals to you, doesn't it? "

" My suspicion grows upon me."

" I wish that I might dispel it; but when you take that tone it is hard to get back to sensible subjects."

" You do not wish to talk about the grand and noble profession."

" Under the circumstances, I do not."

"You weary of your profession? You wish to escape it?"

"I didn't say so."

"True enough, but the wish is implied. Let me tell you of a way."

No, Mr. John Calhoun Langston, you may not. You are very quick to make an opportunity, but so also is this young lady quick to perceive your thoughts and purposes. She is quite equal to her own defense.

"Let me tell you of a way in which you may escape *your* profession. A lawyer who finds so much time for automobile rides very evidently does not enjoy his grand and noble profession."

"Now you are severe. That's a regular trouncing you've given me. But go on. Just so you don't tell me to seek some field of really useful labour."

"I don't suppose you would consider it labour. You do so well at it and enjoy it so much, I was about to suggest that you become a professional chauffeur. Then your life would be one long sweet dream of bliss."

"This is what a man gets for tearing himself away from important business in order to see that the supplies of The Castle of Cheer shall not fail."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Langston. I had not realized the real spring of your effort."

"I am but seldom fully appreciated, Miss Gladys. Don't apologize. It is a common thing for my helpful efforts to be overlooked."

They were nearing Lewistown.

"Do you know where to find the best druggist, Mr. Langston?"

"Trust me. I am Johnny Langston in this town. I went to school here, in the good old days, with Dave

Williams, the doctor's famous son. It is only the very new things in Lewistown that are unfamiliar to Johnny."

And when they drew up at the druggist's the young nurse found that his words were no idle boast. Every one knew him, every one called him Johnny, and every one seemed anxious to serve him. The only delay to their supplies was the anxiety of the clerks to engage him in conversation. Johnny had other purposes in mind, which required that but little time be wasted in Lewistown, but he graciously drove his companion back by way of the college, pointed out the principal buildings, especially Carryall Home, the fine new house of his old fraternity, and gave a rambling account of some of his achievements and a more definite statement of those of his adored chum, David Williams.

Then they were once more on the country road, homeward bound. Having managed the coming journey successfully it was only reasonable that Gladys should feel confident of the return trip. There was just one important factor of interference, however—Johnny Langston was really in earnest. What he had to say must be expressed and there was no opportunity like " this once." He did not propose to say anything while he was engineering an automobile and neither did he propose to say it where interference was likely. Gladys noticed that they were returning by a different road.

" It's just as good," Johnny assured her, " and it gives you a chance to see more of the country. It's quiet but it's very nice."

It was quiet. They drove ten miles without meeting a traveller of any description, and it grew both quieter and nicer all the way. There was no escape from its spell, a stillness that was almost solemn, mile after mile and no one but they two, a stretch of beautiful meadow, somewhat browned by the August sun, but magnificent in its colour, a rippling ford which still held water enough to come nearly up to their engine, a plunge into enchanting woodland and a quiet run through it for more than a mile, with sudden turns from one scene of unexpected beauty to another still more beautiful—and then the car stopped suddenly, and the smiling chauffeur, his face a little grave, was down at once and throwing back the hood for inspection of his cylinders.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Gladys," he assured her. "A little overheating is all. We shall have to wait just a little while for cooling."

"It won't delay us so long that we shall not get back in time for supper?" asked Gladys, with vivid recollections of previous embarrassment.

"Nothing of the kind. Just a short stop and we shall be on the road again. Better get out and get the cramp out of your muscles."

Who could be churlish in such surroundings, on such a day, after such a ride, with such a boy? Certainly not Gladys. It seemed the view was very fine just around the bend, so there they went. And there was no doubt about it. It was fine. It added a little more to the glamour of the afternoon. Gladys sat on an old stump and surveyed the valley before her, with its woods and its water and its great play of colour, in glowing ecstasy.

"Do you like the looks of it?" asked the schemer.

"It is glorious!" exclaimed Gladys. "Such peace, such rest and comfort, such grand colouring and so happily arranged. It is a perfectly beautiful spot."

"I am glad you like it. I want to give it to you," came the startling announcement. "It is mine, my farm. The Judge gave it to me when I was twenty-one, and I want to give it to you, the only condition being that I go with the farm."

John Calhoun Langston probably thought that he had managed this very cleverly, but, as a matter of fact, he had merely demonstrated that, in spite of his many love-affairs, he had no real experience in love-making.

"Why, Mr. Langston," exclaimed the princess; "what a ridiculous thing for you to say!"

Like a flash Johnny perceived his error.

"Not at all! There is nothing ridiculous about it. I put it in a ridiculous way, perhaps. What I should say, Miss Gladys, is that I have loved you ever since I first saw you, and that you are the woman——"

"Stop, Mr. Langston, please. You have known me only a few weeks and you have not any opportunity to judge. I think it is just fine of you to feel nice toward me, but you must not say anything like that."

"And why may I not say what I feel?"

"For one thing, you don't feel it. You couldn't, you know, in so short a time. For another thing, I don't feel it. And for yet another thing, even if I did feel it, I am practically promised to another man."

At this last declaration the pleading young man opened his eyes wide in astonishment—he changed colour—he grasped the top rail of the old fence by his side and tore it tumbling down. This was no trifling affair.

"It is impossible!" he cried. "It is quite impossible."

She would have pitied him more had he said something more politic.

"I don't see what is so impossible," she retorted.

"That you should belong to another man. You are mine. I felt it the first day I saw you. I have felt it so ever since. I have known it all this long afternoon we have spent together. You are mine. What do you mean by practically promised?"

Logic is often shaken by earnest insistence. This was not the easy, smiling Langston she had known. This was a man determinedly in earnest. She was not so sure about her statement. It seemed now to be rather poorly based. But she was brave, somewhat of a fighter, and not easily dominated.

"There is a man who wants me and I know that he wants me, and he is a noble man, and my sister and I have practically agreed upon him. I tell you this, of course, in sacred confidence. You may say that it is cold-blooded calculation. Well and good. It is our way. We owe him great things, especially sister, and he is first."

The colour came back to Johnny's face and he laughed in relief.

"I was afraid it was something really serious," he declared. "Such a claim is nothing against mine. I am first. No one else can be, for you are mine. You belong to me. I know you belong to me, *and you know you belong to me.* It is your sister who must meet your obligations. Tell me, who is the man?"

His tone was compelling. He made no difficulty whatever about asking so intimate a question. But she did not dispute his right.

"It is the minister, Mr. Stroud," she said.

"I have observed Mr. Stroud," remarked Johnny. "He is not in love with you. I would know it in a minute if he were. My antipathies would tell me. Perhaps," he added, thoughtfully, "perhaps he is in love with your sister."

"My sister will never marry," said Gladys. "There are things which you can never know. Mr. Stroud has practically said that he is in love with me and I have practically promised to marry him. We owe him great things and I must keep my promise."

"Practically, you say, practically! That is not love. Love may be practical but love-making rises far above such a level. Now I am quite sure. If you attempt to marry Mr. Stroud I will come and steal you away from him at the altar. You belong to me!"

Thus Johnny declared, but he insisted no more at that time. They walked back to the machine, which now seemed to have transferred its heat to its driver, and the supplies for The Castle were delivered well before the supper hour.

The head nurse keenly watched the young people as they separated, and resolved that no more such opportunities should be allowed. But it was a late hour for locking the door, now that "this once" had passed.

XV

A REGULAR FAITH HEALER

LATHAM CENTRE and its country surrounding admits no rivalry in the quality of its September mornings. Soft and still the air, mellow with the scents of harvest, cool with the faintest promise of the bracing winter which lies away off in the indefinite future, bright with a radiance which gratifies without oppressing, which sparkles rather than glares, warm with a heat which comforts every eager cell but wearies none. It is pleasure to breathe in it, joy to walk in it, rapture to work in it.

On such a September morning the Reverend Milton Stroud came back from his first long walk. He had long since learned that a cure for tuberculosis was not a thirty-day order. His two months had passed. He felt better, much better. He felt more virile strength and manly ardour than he had known for many months. But a serious talk by Doctor Goodman, after a careful examination, had convinced him that his anxious flock in the great city of Chicago must be content with the ministrations of an under-shepherd for still more months.

"Ain't no good expectin' grain to come up over night," Doc Williams had said comfortingly. "It'll come all right. Ye can't see no sign at fust but nature's busy all the time; it's on the way. Soon the little green shoots pops their heads up above the good old brown earth. But even then ye don't run an' shout

'Here it is. It's all ready for harvest.' No good a-doin' that, ye understan' me. Ye waits till ye gets the full corn in the ear afore ye feels like harvestin'. Same way with the cure. Them as gits anything out of it is the ones as waits an' lets Nature keep on with her work till the cells is ripened an' all built up."

This morning he met the doctor at the door of the main building just as the old man had completed the round of visits of comfort and cheer with which, twice each day, he attended every patient of the sanatorium who was confined to bed.

"Mornin' to you," he greeted Stroud. "Don't He send us some beautiful days?"

"I have never seen, or smelled, or felt their equal," responded the Reverend Milton Stroud, with emphasis.

"'This is the day which the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it,'" quoted the doctor.

"It is easier to rejoice as health comes back."

"Sit down an' git rested after yore walk," invited the doctor. "Ye haven't seemed to have s' much on yore soul lately. He's a-liftin' some o' the burden, ain't He?"

"He certainly is, Doctor. And you don't allow me for a moment to forget who is doing it. I declare you are a regular faith healer."

"I hope I'm a faith healer," the old man agreed, quietly. "I do hope I'm a faith healer. I ben in the healin' business by His grace a many years now an' never did I see a'body healed but what I knew He done it. But, mind ye, I ain't a faith healer like that institootion down to the village, ye understan' me."

The old doctor called Latham Centre "the village" just as he had done when it was nothing but "the Corners."

"Is there one there?"

"It's among the added attractions," the old man assured him, drily. "They calls it a school. The village is all et up with schools an' institootions nowadays, an' mebbe they all do some good if it ain't only jest to let off steam. This here school of divine healers is run by a woman, but she has some helpers with whiskers to 'em. She don't need no man to boost her howsumdever, I'll say that. She ain't a bit backward, noways, ye understan' me."

"I hope she doesn't come here," said Stroud.

"Not so's to get in; not usually that is. The gels is putty good guards but wunst in a while she breaks through, say when they's havin' their rest hour or somethin'. She got at me jest t'other day. Thought mebbe I could close her up tellin' her what science done wunst fer my boy, Davy. She jest don't believe in scientific med'sin a little bit. She don't mind s' much if a'body takes a yarb tea but a thing 'at is real science is wuss'n a red rag fer her. So I told her all 'bout Davy's tussle with dipthery, ye understan' me, an' never stopped goin' till Doc Goodman had shot in his last dose of antitoxin an' the boy was beginnin' to look like he might linger on. Affected me so it was jes' like livin' it over again, an' time I'd reached my finish I was plumb triumphant to think what a vallable life had been perserved. An' there she was a-weepin'! Thinks I, 'Yo're closed up fer wunst, Missus.'"

"I suppose it was a triumph of fact over theory," commented Stroud.

"Thought so myself, but it warn't a triumph nor nothin' o' the kind. What d'ye think that woman was weepin' 'bout?"

"I give it up. Such people have always been incomprehensible to me," admitted Mr. Stroud.

"Well, she outs with it in jest a minute, an' I wouldn't hev knowed what she was drivin' at only I remembered 'at I had tried to tell her how Davy had explained that the antitoxin was bred in horses and tested on guinea pigs. She says jest a-sobbin' hard every minute, 'Oh, Doctor,' she says, 'to think o' what them pore guinea pigs must ha' suffered!'

"'Mrs. P.,' I says, real savage, 'I remember readin' somwheres 'bout a man who was ravin' mad with devils. The Master, He comes along, an' at His word them devils goes plumb into a drove of swine an' they goes snortin' down into the sea an' the book says they perished, ye understan' me. But they found the man, Mrs. P., they found the man clothed in his right mind.'

"I can jest imagine I see some one comin' along then and sayin', 'Oh, them pore pigs!' I can imagine what the Master, He would have said."

"It must have been a severe rebuke to the woman," said Mr. Stroud. "I imagine it settled her for the time, anyway."

"Not a bit of it, sir. You don't know that good lady. She did git a set-back a while since when Mary Shane got home from Chicago. She ain't never been quite the same sence Mary come home. Mary was a good deal of a knock-outer for quite a many of 'em. They'd ben insistin' all she needed was a little more faith an' insistin' on it fer months, an' she right in the school all the time. Davy comes home last year fer a visit an' knowin' what a great man an' a good man he is she asked him whether he thought a little more faith would do it. Davy he says, 'yes, it certn'y would.' Jes' as much more faith as was needed to git her up to Chicago with him, ye understan' me. I dunno jest what operation they done on her eyes but it done the work all right, that's sure. She come back here to look into faces she hadn't seen fer twenty years an' to look into the eyes of the grown-up daughter she saw last as a little babby."

"That was certainly a blow for the healers," suggested Mr. Stroud.

"Ye might think so. Ye might think they'd concede a little somep'n to the surgeons arter that. But don't ye believe it. They was two explanations. One was that her unbelievin' husband had always balked their prayers an' when she went to Chicago it tuk her out o' the spear of his influence an' so their prayers at last was answered, ye understan' me. The other explanation was that it wasn't God's work at all but the work of the devil. I never can see why people as is so good that they ain't room for more'n a few o' their kind in the hull earth finds it necessary to be so blasphemous when things goes again 'em."

"I suppose it makes you feel like saying there is no good whatsoever in faith healing?"

"Not exac'ly. I don't even say they's no good in the lady down to the village. Her idees is mixed. Davy said when he was here that if he took up with their idee of considerin' every ailment a punishment inflicted by a severe Judge for some misdemeaniour he would diagnose their trouble as a mental perversion inflicted upon 'em for the sin o' thinkin' that God's most important requirement is fussin' over our own individual ailments. He said he was ready to admit the importance of thinkin' the thoughts an' doin' the deeds that'll keep our circ'lation an' digestion good, but the person that's allus makin' a special point o' this destroys his own automatic control."

"Meaning that when we begin the attempt to consciously direct our organs we weaken the automatic regulation which is far more important!"

"Yore language puts it just about right," the old doctor agreed. "'Take no thought for yore body,' He said, an' it's a lot best not to, ye understan' me."

"But these faith healers claim some wonderful cures?"

"They certn'y do. An' they makes the most of 'em. One cure 'at took place back in '88 will fill a book that can be circ'lated over five continents an' keep up its circ'lation a quarter century, ye understan' me. But say, tell me now. Did ye ever hear of Mary Shane's cure before?"

"I never did," admitted the minister.

"But now, supposin' by some miracle it had been done in these faith healers' school, would ye heard of it?"

"I suppose it would possibly have been in every newspaper in the land."

"It most surely would. An' they'd have Mary write a book an' it would have ben sold through ten editions by now, ye understan' me. But why didn't that surgeon write a book 'bout it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps because it's his regular business."

"Ye hit it. Ye hit the nail plumb on the head, son. It's his regular business, ye understan' me. He's doin' it right along, p'raps not every day but often enough so it ain't by no means uncommon. An' they's thousan's of doctors an' surgeons doin' just such work every day that goes—work that couldn't be did fifty years ago, twenty years ago, not ten years ago. What c'n ye say 'bout folks as deliberately shuts their eyes to all that?"

"But don't you believe in faith healing at all?"

"Most surely, most surely, son, I certainly do. I believe in it every day. I see it every day right aroun' me. Every day that you lay still in yore bed on the porch there, and breathed in the pure air an' expected that maybe next mornin' yore temperature would be somers near normal you was a subject of faith healing."

"I see. I quite agree. But about the extraordinary cures; those where it seems so clear that man's extremity is God's opportunity?"

"Yes. I believes in them too, son, an' every God-fearin' doctor does. But it has to be man's extremity —his extremity, ye understan' me. I believe God made the ravens feed the prophet at a certain time, but I also believe that, when times of plenty come, if the prophet had said, 'Well, that was sure easy pickin'. I guess them ravens can consider themselves hired for a steady job,' he'd had a awful hollow feelin' in his stomach 'fore long, ye understan' me. It's the same principle that makes me right sure He didn't endow herbs an' plants an' minerals with all kind o' healing less'n He expected man to use 'em."

"You think the doctor should only ask God's help when he has no help of his own?"

"Ye don't put that as pretty as ye might, parson. Why not ask God's help anyway? S'posin' I ask Him 'bout a dipthery patient. He'll prob'ly say, 'Certn'y, Doc, give him some antitoxin.' S'posin' I give it an' he ain't no better, an' I give all else I know an' he ain't no better; I'd go back to Him an' I'd say, 'Lord, I've done all I know. I've used everything I've got. Show me some other kind. If there's nothing more you can show me to use, Lord, heal him by Thy mighty word jest as Jesus healed 'em when He was here. Only help him back to the work 'at needs him, if it be Thy will.'"

"But you know, Doctor, they believe that God prefers to exercise such power as Jesus used during His earthly stay, in every case."

"That's the way they tell it, son. They say they do. I've observed some very strikin' differences, though. You look up all the healin' of Jesus that's on record, an' you'll notice one thing 'at allus happened. When He spoke the word they was healed at once. The blind saw—the lame walked—the man who was carried in on a bed picked it up an' walked right off with it, ye understan' me. It ain't so with their healin', not so as I've noticed. It takes time jes' like mine does. They don't make good with me, son."

"You don't usually pray for miracles, then?"

"Depends on what ye mean. I couldn't jes' fancy myself saying, 'Lord, hear me now about this case o' sickness. You know me, Lord. I'm old Doc ye always thinks s' much of. I don't want to go arter no med'sin, Lord. Work me one o' them miracles 'at always seemed to come so easy when Jesus was here.'

"No, I couldn't fancy that, but I might say"—the unconscious dramatist's voice changed from the easy familiarity of his mimicry to one of deep reverence:

"'Lord, this is a mighty bad case. There's a heap o' remedies, Lord. Help me choose the right one.'

"And if it didn't work I might go back an' say:

"'Lord, teach me something else to do. Send some one else to help.' And if it still failed I'd be bold then to throw myself on His grace an' say:

"'Lord, I ain't ben able to do a thing. But, oh, Lord, there's many a thing beyond me in Thy bounteous store. Oh, Lord, help us. Make bare Thy mighty arm. Work Thy miracles of healing, Lord.'

"An' I believe I know some times when He's done it."

XVI

ADVANCE FEE—TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS!

THE manager of New Hope, Doctor Middane, professed himself to the citizens of Latham Centre as both aggrieved and injured by the treatment accorded him by Doctor Goodman. He resented especially the imputation that he would turn away a person whose money was low. As a matter of fact Doctor Middane turned no man away because he had but little money—it was the one guilty of possessing none at all who received his merited scorn. It was true the doctor could not offer bed and board to those who had but scant supply, but he could and frequently did sell them a home cure, in the shape of his Oxy-juvenator.

This was a peculiarly ingenious arrangement so manufactured as to make impressionable people see in it a value anywhere from thirty to sixty dollars (largely depending upon which amount most nearly represented the sum of their substance). A meddlesome health official pulled one to pieces and declared that its contents were nothing but sulphur, sand, and charcoal, and not more than ten cents worth at that. But, as Doctor Middane promptly pointed out, it was not to be supposed that a man of his calibre would be clever enough to detect the potent healing forces which had been imparted to the instrument by all the mystic wizardry of the Far East. All that this health official could possibly say did not unprint the splendid volume of testimonials which he was always willing, even eager to produce.

But in spite of that book of testimonials, and in spite of the fact that they had been written by bankers, great men of business, governors, and even a senator, Doctor Goodman still retained his absurd prejudice. "It is a money-getting scheme," he insisted (as if he did not take money for his own work). "Let it cost the life of a single child, who dies while that inert abomination is being relied upon in place of honest medicine, and its promoter is a murderer."

Harsh words, these sayings of Doctor Goodman; and he had still harsher for the Hermann tuberculosis serum, the administration of which was the real business of New Hope. So it is no exaggeration to say that its proprietor considered the doctor quite unneighbourly and, in fact, unfriendly.

It was just such unfriendly feelings that prompted Doctor Goodman to request Attorney John C. Langston to call at the New Hope sanatorium. Mr. Langston was as prejudiced as Doctor Goodman, his prejudices, indeed, being a second edition of the doctor's. He was not recognized by the attendant of New Hope and was shown into a waiting-room, Doctor Middane being engaged. It happened that the door connecting with the room which served the illustrious doctor both for consultation and sleeping purposes was somewhat ajar, and Attorney Langston was, therefore and thereby, grieved to learn that an old friend of his, Luigi, the barber, in spite of warning to the contrary, was trying to arrange for the injection into his person of the Hermann serum for tuberculosis. It seemed that Luigi had been reading the advertisements in a certain Chicago newspaper.

Luigi's surname was not generally known in Latham Centre, most of the citizens holding the opinion that in addressing him as Looey Gee they gave him plenty of names for any dago. He had come to Latham Centre a couple of years before, induced perhaps by its reputation as a place of cure for troubles of the lungs. But the particular property of Latham Centre that was good for the lungs Luigi carefully shut away from himself for fully five months of the year, and, being afraid of night air, he shut it away eight or ten hours of the daily cycle the whole year round. He had fooled himself and his compatriots for some time with his talk of "tossa nervosa," but a nervous cough should not last forever, and, at last, aided by the advertising section of his Chicago paper, he had reached the place where he desired the Hermann cure for consumption.

Doctor Middane assured him that he could cure him. We have reliable evidence of this, for it was the first thing that Lawyer Langston heard through that partially closed door.

"But my work?" stipulated Luigi. "My work I cannot leave."

"Not at all necessary," Doctor Middane agreed. "You come to New Hope once a week for inspection, and whenever we see the need for it we give you a new injection."

"So I keep on working?"

"Every day. No need of any interference at all."

"Grazie, Signor, grazie!" exclaimed Luigi. "I will then soon be well. My business it shall grow so that I am soon able to pay the money."

"You pay before we begin," said Doctor Middane, definitely.

"Signor, I cannot."

"It is the only way."

"Signor, it is impossible."

"Nonsense. An Italian talk of impossible! If you haven't money, get it. We run this place at a tremendous cost, and we have to get money and work hard for it. See this," he picked a handful of currency and coin from a drawer in the desk. Lawyer Langston could hear the rustle of the bills and the clink of the gold. "Do you think this came without effort? Think and scheme and plan is our way to get it. You must do the same. Come with the money and you get the treatment."

"But, Signor, hear unto me. The so illustrious doctor will not be hard. My woman! the bambini! already they starve because customers come so few to Luigi's shop. Patienza, Signor. Once the so wonderful medicine has cured Luigi customers again will come. We pay soon—oh, so soon! Signor, for the woman and bambini!" Luigi's appealing gaze and outstretched hands might have softened any human heart.

"Won't do with us. I don't know you. Never saw you before, though you say you are in business here. We have our rules. Every one who wants money very bad can get it some way. You get the money, we give the treatment."

"But, Signor, two hundred dollar! It is impossible!"

"You mean to say that I charge more than a cure is worth?"

"Scusi, scusi, Signor. It is worth all; but to Luigi it is impossible!"

"I'm busy to-day, Luigi. Go home and think it over—you will find a way. Come next week with the money and the treatment begins."

John Calhoun Langston waited to hear no more. What use to attempt peaceful argument with such a man? He would prefer to see what legal processes could do. When Doctor Middane looked into the waiting-room, annoyed to find that the door had been ajar during his conversation with this Luigi, he was relieved that there had been no one to overhear.

XVII

LUIGI FINDS THE MONEY

LUIGI CALVINI was one of the humblest citizens of Latham Centre and considered himself fortunate to be a citizen in any degree. He looked upon the municipal officials, who, until his cough became so very annoying, had often submitted to his ministrations, as a doorkeeper may look upon a potentate who wields the sceptre. Yet, in very truth, Luigi was a better citizen and a more honest than most of those superior beings, for in the rush of newcomers which changed Latham Corners to Latham Centre and made a city of it the little place had fallen into bad hands, and, for the present, grafters were in power and grafting in fashion. Luigi had always been honest. Most of the officials he held in reverence held their honesty as a "once upon a time" story. With all that, strange though it may seem, the humble, honest Luigi was a greater enemy to the community than some of the elected grafters.

Of late Luigi's power for harm had been advertised by a most annoying cough, and had therefore lessened with his lessening custom. Luigi's honesty was of the kind that gives itself no peace if there remains an unpaid bill, and will starve before it contracts one that it cannot expect to meet. But the bambini! Always there is the problem of the bambini! That makes it different. And it would be no problem at all if only the illustrious Signor Doctor would inject beneath

Luigi's olive skin a few doses of the so greatly advertised medicine, which newspapers even so far away as the tremendous New York assure all people is effective. In his mind there rise visions of a well Luigi; of a smiling Luigi, with no cough, no need to hurry a customer along because warned by that irresistible, hot, confused tickling that a spell is imminent and unavoidable. And with this picture of health are visions of returning customers in such numbers that two, three, even four chairs are added, and perhaps a coloured boy for shoes and a young lady for a cashier; who knows?

Oh, this elusive Health! How foolish we were to lose her. What great things we will do once she again condescends to smile upon us. How careful we will be. How joyous to have her in our possession once more. Nothing else will matter. There can be no cloud so gloomy as to sadden us, once she is returned. Oh, this elusive Health!

And then Luigi's thoughts came coldly back to the impossible sum—two hundred dollars! Where had he seen so much money in all his life? But, yes! The Signor Doctor had so displayed it this very day. Roll upon roll of money bills had the Signor held to his gaze, and with contempt at that. The Signor was not afraid to do so, for all men knew that Luigi was honest. It was hard-worked money had the Signor said? But how about the Luigis for whom money would not hard-work? Why not? Luigi's bambini should not starve. Why not make the money work a little harder? Let it pay the Signor for curing Luigi. He never would know. After, when Luigi was well, certainly with interest it should be repaid.

Why will good men take such thoughts into their bosoms, even for contemplation? Is it not always "first pity, then embrace"?

That night the clouds lay heavy over Latham Centre and over New Hope. It was a close and sultry night. Flashes of lightning, for occasional seconds, lit the heavy gloom. It was in one of these flashes that Doctor Middane, lying in an alcove of his office, turned restlessly from his sleep and saw the figure of Luigi in the act of committing a felony at his desk. It was unfortunate for Luigi that Doctor Middane always kept a revolver by his pillow, for, almost as quick as the flash of lightning, came another flash which meant a bullet in Luigi's left shoulder. It was unfortunate for Doctor Middane that he also kept a loaded revolver at his desk, for the third flash, which followed very quickly because it was blind impulse on the part of Luigi, signified that a bullet was to penetrate Doctor Middane's prostrate form.

There were no more flashes either from the heavens or the earth. The night was dark.

It was almost as heavy and sultry at The Castle of Cheer as in Latham Centre. Bissington Jones and his friend Banks were up late, by special license. The young folks had been having some amateur out-door theatricals and discipline was, for once, relaxed. Cassius Banks, being a professional, was bound to talk over the minutest detail of the acting, and Bissington Jones, not being a good sleeper, was glad to sit with him on the rustic seat by the ornamental gates. At the door of the administration building still stood the machine of John Calhoun Langston, who had waited that he might say a few last words of appreciation to certain of the staff of nurses.

"Some one is coming here in an awful hurry," said Jones.

"This is no place to come to in a hurry," responded Cassius. "The hurry is to get away."

"If more would hurry getting here they wouldn't have to stay so long," remarked Bissington.

"I'm not disputing it," Cassius acquiesced. "But why hurry away? It's a peaceful enough holiday when you get settled down to it. I never had so easy a time in my life."

"All right for you, Cass, a dried old single-stick! Mighty different when a wife and three kiddies are waiting for you."

The newcomer interrupted the conversation. Interrupted is too mild a word; he violently and suddenly arrested it by rushing up and dropping at their feet with a gasp.

"It is I, Luigi!" he cried, excitedly, as speech became possible. "It is upon my hands—the blood! I have killed! I slay the Signor Doctor!"

It was a startling announcement to be thrown into the middle of a quiet conversation about home and family. It was a startling figure which threw it. Face blanched from loss of blood, wild eyes, long hair in disarray, much of his clothing saturated with the blood which had ceased to flow as the matted clothing compressed the wound, the arc light over the gateway threw its rays on a wild-looking object. Fortunate indeed that, of all the residents of The Castle, the two most cosmopolitan should be there to receive the shock.

They sprang to action at once. Jones laid the exhausted man on the grass and supported his head while Cassius ran for help. Down came the machine in a moment with Johnny and the two sister nurses.

"It is Luigi, the barber!" exclaimed Johnny. "What is the cause of the bleeding, Luigi? Have you had a hemorrhage?" He explained aside that the man was tuberculous.

"A hemorrhage of the bullet, Signor," gasped Luigi, scarcely able to talk. "Let me tell it all to you. Listen to me, I implore. I go to Signor the Doctor for his cure. He demand the so great sum, two hundred dollar. I conceive the idea—I will borrow it from the Signor."

With excited gestures he told them the story. Twice did Mary Standlaws endeavour to quiet him, but he was so evidently suffering an excitement which would not be relieved until the tale was unloaded that she let him continue.

"I can bear out part of what he says," said Johnny. "I heard his conversation with the brute and heard the insistence upon the pound of flesh. 'Get it some way,' the grafter commanded, and Luigi seems to have tried."

"Yes, sir. I got her," said Luigi. "I now can take the medicine which so wonderful is it will cure me. But the man—he is dead!"

Their sympathies all went to the prostrate man. But here was a terrible situation. By his own confession he had shot a man. Two of the party were lawyers—all were responsible citizens. What was their duty? Sister Mary gave the answer.

"We must put him to bed and get Doctor Goodman to look to his wound," she said.

"Let us do it quietly," suggested Cassius. "Let us not give the poor fellow up to justice for such a mistake."

"Let us not give him up to injustice," said Johnny.

"The man most likely to sit as his judge would condemn him for the mere reason of his nationality. The county attorney would persecute rather than prosecute him because the other side has money and he none."

"There is no need of any one knowing but ourselves and the doctors," argued Cassius. "We can hide him, can't we, Miss Mary?"

"We have no place to hide any one, Mr. Banks. But why try? We have room in one of the cottages. He is tuberculous—a new case. We will just put him to bed. It is often hard to recognize a person in bed—they look so very different."

"This man will look different by the time I get through with him," said the actor, with his mind on his make-up box. "Let Doctor Goodman dress his wound and I those long moustaches."

And they put him to bed; and so, through the courtesy of Doctor Middane, Luigi really entered upon a course of effective treatment for tuberculosis.

And these good people conspired against the law? Everyone of them. There is no word to condone it. There is no explanation. They conspired to defeat the satisfaction of the law, and any lawyer will tell you that their offence was beyond excuse. No excuse lay in the fact that Latham Centre's jail was the dirtiest that ever disgraced a pushing little city. No excuse in the fact that both city attorney and county attorney were creatures of graft, working for graft, and would undoubtedly follow the rule

When a man's down, give him a thrust,
Trample the beggar into the dust.

No excuse in the fact that the judge who would try the case had said and also demonstrated that no alien need expect mercy in his court. No excuse anywhere. It stands without excuse.

But thank God it does stand. When the sheriff of the county searched the sanatorium—the sheriff who had been shaved by Luigi many times and oft before the cough was so very bad—was shown the new patient quietly sleeping, his clean-shaven face looking even more hollow than natural because of the artistically inscribed shadows which Cassius Banks had so efficiently transposed from his make-up box, he tiptoed gently out and went on his way.

XVIII

THE LATHAM *WEEKLY HERALD*

WELL, how did it all come out? Was Doctor Middane killed? No, the good doctor was not killed. Read the newspapers. Read the Latham *Weekly Herald,* which gave a concise and plain though not voluminous account of the whole transaction. What the *Herald,* for very good reasons, did not give an account of, was that the new patient at The Castle, who was quite ill with tuberculosis, and was supposed by most of the other patients to be an Italian count who spoke very little English, would have borne a striking resemblance to the missing Luigi had he been decorated with masses of black hair on his head and two long moustaches of the same on his face. Neither did it say that some mysterious persons had suddenly become much interested in the welfare of Mrs. Luigi and the bambini, so that they were quite well provided for. And it is rather doubtful if the *Herald* would have said these things even had they been within the editor's knowledge, for, strangely enough, the *Herald* had never accepted the credentials of Doctor Middane and New Hope as perfectly reliable, and the enterprising doctor had never felt able to reckon the paper or its editor among those friends who were absolutely to be depended upon.

The Latham *Weekly Herald* had been growing in circulation and in exposition of the truth for many years. Its editor, who was also its owner and manager, had reached the enviable place where his contributions to the magazine and book literature of the day were so remunerative that he was quite independent of any income from his paper; consequently he said what he pleased; consequently his circulation fattened and his paper throve. The more outrageously he used his privilege of American citizenship to express his opinion exactly as he opined it, the more eagerly did his fellow-citizens purchase his paper to see what he had to say. Some of his sayings were very pertinent, some were quite impertinent, and all of them were delightfully frank. He received some forcible protests but not so many as one might suppose. As one injured native expressed it: " What's the use saying anything to Holmes about it? *He* don't give a darn!"

When an outraged subscriber wrote to Mr. Holmes, " Sir, all that I can say about you is that you are an ass!" he printed the letter with full signature and the simple comment: " This is mighty good of Ike. We wish we might honestly check our opinion of him at that point."

When the *Herald* appeared, on the Saturday following the adventure which resulted so disastrously for the doctor-manager of New Hope, that gentleman, being fully able to read, opened the paper with great interest. He found his item on the front page, headed " A Regrettable Accident."

" The manager of the institution known as New Hope is confined to his bed with a bullet wound in his chest, which we are glad to inform the public is not likely to do great damage. We extend our sympathy to the gentleman and hope there will be no occasion for further accidents of this nature."

That was all, on the news page, but the editor was much given to enjoying himself with second-page editorials, and to that page Doctor Middane turned with expectation that was not disappointed.

Being an editorial it started right in without heading, "We have been urged to write something very definite about the recent affair which injured one of our most honest and industrious citizens and one other of whom we regret that as much cannot be recorded." (What does he mean by that? thought Doctor Middane.) "As we have often said, one of the great advantages of a weekly is that it gives one so much time that there is no great likelihood of making unguarded statements. After thinking this matter over a couple of days, and having reports from people who should know, as well as from people who could not possibly know, we conclude that the trouble grew out of the doctor's desire to possess two hundred dollars. We have often been reminded that we are neither judge nor jury, and this we admit. But long newspaper training has at least taught us how to use facts. Luigi applied to the doctor for a cure. The doctor said two hundred dollars. Luigi said the sum was impossible. The doctor said he could get it if he tried. Luigi tried. The doctor woke up in the midst of his effort and fired. Luigi picked up the doctor's own revolver, which lay on the desk, with a natural impulse to check any further artillery display. We do not condemn the doctor for his hasty action in discharging his revolver. He had no assurance that Luigi would content himself with the amount at issue. But we understand that examination shows that Luigi took exactly the stipulated amount. We feel, therefore, that the doctor should not censure a foreign-born gentleman for an uncomfortably literal interpretation of his instructions."

Copy was, no doubt, scarce in the *Herald* office, for on page four the editor took another turn at the same subject, under the caption "Why hunt Luigi?"

"Our gentlemanly sheriff honours us with an invitation to join a posse to hunt Luigi—the humble citizen who until very recently gave so freely of his services as a barber.

"There are many reasons why we object to forming a segment of such a body, and to anticipate unkind criticism we will admit frankly that among them, and not the least, lies the fact that our girth has increased tremendously in the last few, law-abiding years, so that as a target we would now be a temptation out of all proportion to our importance as a member of the posse. Willing though we may be to face all the dangers connected with the editorial control of a sheet which seeks to give impartial decisions on matters both public and private in character, we draw the line at such sport as is offered by a sheriff's posse.

"And then, why should we hunt Luigi?

"We have interviewed several prominent citizens in order that we may give a really representative opinion.

"Young Lawyer Langston says: 'Don't hunt him. It may be true that he was in the man's office examining his roll; but only a few hours before that I heard Luigi beg this man piteously to give him his alleged cure for tuberculosis. Yes, said the man, for two hundred dollars. When Luigi asserted that it should be paid when cured, the reply he got was "No pay, no cure," and he was told that there were certainly ways in which he, an Italian, could get the coin. Probably Luigi never had such a suggestion made to him before.

He was honest. But he was also desperate, and after thinking it over concluded to follow out the doctor's suggestion in this logical way. And then the man went and shot him for it. He admits it. He also admits that it was with his own extra revolver that Luigi stopped him from fulfilling his murderous intent. Be content. Don't hunt Luigi—take the doctor.'

"Our venerable friend, Doc Williams, takes an opposing view. 'Certainly we should hunt Luigi,' said he. 'We owe it to the poor man to let him know how sorry we are that he has been here this long time suffering with illness among all us Christian people and we never doing a thing for him. We must hunt him out and bring him back for treatment. And, too, we need to let him know that we have begun to take care of his wife and children, and will keep on doing it until he is able.'

"Doctor Goodman also thinks we should hunt him.

"'By all means,' said the doctor. 'A man so afflicted should be found in order that he may be intelligently advised how to so care for himself that he may live in safety and with safety to the community. He should be placed in an institution where he can be cured and should be relieved of all responsibility while this is being done. This is certainly a work which the State should shoulder, but I do not think it should be done through a sheriff's posse.'

"Our sheriff's views are very simple. 'Certainly we'd orter hunt him,' says he. 'Ain't he an Eyetalian?'

"Being impressed with the clarity of this officer's opinions and feeling sure that their stability is as undeniable as their logic, we suggest to the many Italian workers in the oil-fields who possess a vote, that they give very careful consideration to this declaration.

"Perhaps our most interesting interview was with a certain baker of our community, who, being a very modest man, shall be nameless.

"'He was a enemy to the community, anyway!' said the baker, blowing his nose in his customary manner and being at some pains to wipe his fingers on his apron before resuming his kneading. 'Barbers with lung trouble certn'y didn't orter be allowed to work—not unless they're white barbers, anyway. They're blowin' their breath into your face all the time. No man with lung trouble like that ought to be allowed to work, especially a dago. Now a baker's different. I don't mind havin' a man with a little cough around my shop so much. Y' see all the bread's baked in an oven arter he gets through with it, anyway!' (Evidently our baker friend has not yet met the man who sees little difference between consuming a mortuary and an aquarium.)

"'Supposing the barber is a white man?' we asked him.

"'That's some different!' he admitted. 'A white man's gotta make a living. What's he going to do if you take his trade away?'

"Feeling that this raised a question of interest to our readers we put the matter up to our esteemed friend, Doc Goodman.

"'It is a very serious and important question,' the doctor agreed. 'It involves one upon which hangs this whole great problem of stamping out the great white plague.' (Doc didn't really say 'the great white plague,' he hates the term,—but it slipped off our newspaper pen and we intend to let it stand.) 'So far, as people of a great country, we have just played with this matter. When we reach the point of a real recognition of its importance, the problem will no longer be one for individuals to batter at as those who " fight the air " but it will be a measure for state and nation. There will then be sufficient funds to take such a man from his work and support his dependents while he is being cured, and we shall soon get to the place where we shall see results.'

" So you see, old Doc Williams is right. We ought to hunt Luigi to look after him. We hope these remarks will be helpful to our readers. They have given us quite a helpful lift this week."

XIX

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD

A LITTLE child, wandering from its mother's side to the platform, may steal the audience from a polished orator. So we turn from this most momentous social problem to resume the humble love affairs of John Calhoun Langston.

Let it not for a moment be supposed that Johnny was the person to apologetically surrender because the lady whom he had selected for the honour of an interest in perpetuity in himself, his lands, emoluments, talents, graces, and affections interposed the objection that she was already under contract to another.

Johnny could not exactly be classed as a novice in affairs of the heart. Endowed by nature with a heart expansion of unusual dimensions and a genial personality, combined with attractive graces of presence and speech, it could scarcely be expected that he would attain his years of maturity undisturbed by manifestations of tender interest in the complementary sex. But we may concede that there had been no previous attack which would have resisted even a mild rejection.

In this case Johnny had no thought of being rejected. No matter how many trifling experiences, or experiences of trifling a man may have undergone, when he reaches the really foreordained case he realizes the difference—perhaps the more definitely because of his experiences. He becomes sober about it, tremendously earnest, quite likely timorous, but none the less determined and dauntless. He refuses to consider any obstacle insurmountable, short of death or the married state. Had Gladys Standlaws told John Calhoun Langston of her pledge to the minister in such a tone of definite conviction as to ring in his heart that her love had gone with it, he would have gone to Africa like a gentleman; but lacking this ring of conviction he decided to stay strictly on the field and battle for home and country.

Although the minister might be considered as having won the toss Johnny was not altogether void of advantages. For one thing he was absolutely well and strong, and for another he was absolutely in love with Gladys and with Gladys only. Then, too, he had a fine automobile, as much time as he could steal from his flourishing practice, a knowledge of the surrounding country which comprehended all of the most charming and most secluded exhibitions of primitive nature, and many friends and well-wishers. Important among these was Doc Williams, who thought him next only to his Davy, and Mrs. Goodman who gave him similar place—a high place indeed, for David was both son and son-in-law. There was another young man who would take precedence of Johnny in her classification of perfect manhood, in a matter of some twenty years, but at this time his speech was too incoherent to allow him to present his claims.

It was to Mrs. Goodman that Johnny took an appeal about this time. It was a beautiful evening and he found the lady on the porch of her private apartments at The Inn, playing with the baby.

"That's a remarkably fine boy you have there, Lady," he addressed her, familiarly.

"I know that very well, Johnny Langston, and it is no new discovery on your part. What do you want me to do for you now?"

"What a suspicious Lady this baby has for a mother. Let me take him for a while. See him reach out his hands. He wants to come to Uncle Johnny and go way up!"

"Now, you be careful with him, Johnny. Doctor says it is bad for a baby to get him all excited," cautioned the Lady, as she handed over the precious bundle.

"I was brought up that way and it didn't hurt me," Johnny assured her.

"I suppose it would be rude for me to tell you what I think about that," hinted the Lady.

"No, you couldn't be rude, Lady. I suppose you think I still show where it addled my head."

"Well, you are excited this very minute!"

"Who wouldn't be excited, thinking of being rejected by the only girl he ever loved?" It was characteristic of Johnny to blurt out his subject in this way, after all the show of diplomacy he had made in his opening.

"Which only girl is this one, Johnny?" Mrs. Goodman laughed as she asked the question.

"I'm afraid you aren't going to take this seriously," objected Johnny, unwinding the baby from around his neck. "I'll just lay this burden down and go."

"If you want me to take anything seriously you'd better act as if you were serious, instead of carrying on your usual nonsense," suggested the Lady.

So Johnny began at the beginning and told her as much as he thought best.

"But, my dear boy, if a girl tells you she is already engaged, I don't see what more you can honourably do."

"Perhaps not in some cases. But I believe she just promised this man because he asked her."

"And why else should she promise him?"

"Now see here, Lady. You aren't playing fair. You know there's a difference between taking a man just because he asks and you see no objection, and taking him because you really want him."

"Which is what she would do in your case, I suppose?"

"Well, it wouldn't be taking me just because I was a preacher, anyway."

"It certainly would not, Johnny Langston."

"Well, you see what I want you to do, Lady."

"Tell me."

"I want you to get real well acquainted, and show her what a mistake it would be for a healthy young girl to throw herself away on a consumptive preacher."

"You are off on the wrong foot, Johnny. He isn't in bad shape, at all. I know, for Doctor told me just the other day that he is getting well. A healthy young girl is just the person he ought to marry. Remember, I'm a doctor's wife."

"I guess I was a brute to say that about the poor chap," admitted the tender-hearted Johnny. "But let him marry some other healthy young girl. I want this one to be Mrs. John Calhoun Langston. She isn't just pretty; she's like a dancing sunbeam; she's like a woodland fairy; she's like a soft summer breeze laden with violets; she's like a peal of merry bells. She's just the very one for a headstrong, foolish, cyclonic person like John Langston."

"Johnny, you certainly have a profound infection.

I must really get better acquainted with her if she is all those things. But, you know, we can't steal her from the minister if he——"

"Now, Lady, let me interrupt just a minute. I'm trying to be square. Honestly I am. I would try to do the impossible and dam up the Niagara that is loose in me if I thought she really loved him. But I don't—I'm not even sure she's engaged to him. And you know there's lots of engagements that never ought to ripen. Why, that's why people have engagements—just to try each other out and see if they are quite sure about it. So what's the good of giving up just because a girl's engaged? And you know I believe she said yes to him because he's a sick man and she wanted to cheer him up. You find out for me, won't you, Lady?"

And the Lady promised.

But when Johnny reached his office next morning he ceased to exult in the advantage he expected to gain from the aid of Mrs. Goodman, in his excitement over a new advantage which dropped into his hands as a gift from the gods. He found it in a very prosaic mailbox, a very prosaic, legal envelope concealing its rich interest.

Johnny was always interested in opening his mail. He was one of those fortunate individuals who always have some project working, from which great things are to be expected, and so any mail might be of interest. But he had no special dealings with any official in Cook County, Illinois, and knew of no reason why the large envelope addressed in such clerkly style should occasion any heart thrills. There was a legal document enclosed which purported to be a copy of the will of one William Vancil Doane.

Since he had never heard of the gentleman, and a hasty survey failed to show any reference to himself or any of his friends, he turned an interested mind to the accompanying letter, to learn why this will had been sent to him. More by chance than by reason, it seemed; it had been sent because the directory showed him to be a lawyer in good standing. The officer sending it wanted it handled through a lawyer. A person writing from Latham Centre, a Mary Standlaws, had asked for a copy, and the writer begged to remind Mr. John C. Langston, Lawyer, that a reward of a thousand dollars for the Mary Beamish named in the will still held good, and that if, by reason of this hint, he was enabled to locate the lady and secure the reward, the writer would certainly expect—and so on.

Johnny Langston forgot all about the writer of the letter in two minutes. He was interested in the will. A few years ago the attempts to find the heiress and the circumstances of the will had been common newspaper property. Mary Beamish and her young sister had both mysteriously disappeared. Who was this Mary Beamish? Why should Mary Standlaws be interested in this will? What had one to do with the other? The legal affairs of Messrs. Langston and Langston were allowed to accumulate that morning so far as the junior partner was concerned. He sat at his desk reading the will, and he sent for old files of newspapers and clippings and spent much time on them. Did he think that he might win a reward? What was the prize at issue—a thousand dollars?

XX

MISS JOLLEY OFFERS FIRST AID

GLADYS might resolve as she would to forget that trip to Lewistown, that return journey by the nice and quiet road, that stop for the engine to cool while the driver exhibited his beautiful scene and then in so amazing a way invited her to possess it—she might resolve all she pleased, but the picture was not to be wiped from her memory by any amount of resolving, and most certainly would resolving fail to erase it so long as she took it out and gave one last look at it every quiet moment. The picture was holding its own very well, thank you.

To go to the stake and burn for one's faith is easier than to carry it along day after day when all fervour has departed. To renounce all earthly affection is easy in a glow of enthusiasm but how hard the daily doing. Every day now the sacrifice Gladys was trying to make for her sister seemed very real. To like the Reverend Milton Stroud was no hard thing, to enjoy his company was no task, but to imagine herself tied to him for life—always there came the picture of frank, ingenuous, impulsive Johnny saying so emphatically, " Yes, but you belong to me! "

A logical way to erase this picture would be to allow the minister to cover it with one more attractive. He was rather deceiving himself with the idea that the canvas was one prepared for him and that it would be his lot in life to spread thereon some of his best work.

As he gained in health and felt returning to his body the vigour of his young manhood, he knew more and more positively that he was very much in love. But he still had occasional moments when he was not quite clear with whom. After all there was nothing more than an understanding with either sister. No definite vows had been made. What Stroud had said had been largely by communication with the older sister, and what Gladys admitted had travelled by the same route. Yet Stroud felt that he had said enough to bind himself, and was content to have it so.

Mr. Stroud could talk with patients at almost any hour of the day but there was but one hour in the afternoon when he could talk with nurses. And even at that hour if he wanted to walk and talk with the nurse it must be done stealthily to escape observation. So the Reverend Milton Stroud at a definite hour, was waiting anxiously near a favourite road which was often traversed in her exercise hour by the nurse whom he particularly desired to see.

Mr. Stroud did not suppose for a moment that other persons might be interested in his walks abroad, might be able to guess at his plans and even be so much concerned as to try in a friendly way to further his purposes. It was with some surprise and a trifle of annoyance that he came upon good-hearted Miss Jolley, too directly in his way to be avoided.

"Good-morning, Reverend," she greeted him, her intent plainly being to combine friendship with respect, "you are jumping along in fine shape. You look like a new man, already. How's the new patient, the Italian count? Do you know?"

"I hear that he is improving, Miss Jolley. I have not seen him."

"Nor I. And I'm just dying for a good square look at a real count. He has money by the bushel, I hear. I hope Doctor charges him good."

"I don't know as to that. I have seen counts in Chicago who were quite poor."

"Dear old Chicago!" exclaimed Miss Jolley. "It has everything, don't it? I'm just dying to go back."

"Are you a native of Chicago, Miss Jolley?"

"Only by adoption. I was born and raised in the country and folks laugh at me for loving Chicago. It's done everything for me but marry me off, and I guess no city couldn't do that. When I get back there I'll pretty near die for this place; but while I'm here I think no place is like the city. You that way?"

"Quite the contrary. The longer I stay here the better I like it."

"Yes indeed; or the better you like he, she, it, or her. There's other things beautiful besides scenery in this neighbourhood, Reverend Stroud."

Stroud looked into her friendly, rollicking eyes and laughed aloud.

"Your allusions are quite beyond my understanding," he objected feebly.

"That's just where they was aimed at, Reverend. This is a thing that understanding don't have anything to do with, and that much I know—old maid or no old maid. All the right I got in this game is to say if ever you want a chaperon or somebody to carry a note or any help of any kind—why, don't forget that I saved your life once and I'm ready to do it again. Honest I am!"

Living near to nature is destructive to the dignity of man. A few months ago the Reverend Milton Stroud, addressed in this manner, would have turned the familiar person into an icy pillar and her familiarities to pendent icicles. Now, after one flash of mortification that his plans should be so obvious, he had the good nature to humour the lady's offered patronage.

"I don't forget how you rescued me," he admitted. "I believe I need no assistance just at present, thank you."

"I'm your friend when you do, Reverend Stroud. They're both angels. Miss Mary, I reckon she's way out of reach of mortal man—any man; but the other one, she'll do. She's as sweet as a fairy. I'm a-goin' to get my letter put in your church soon as I get home, Reverend Stroud, just so I'll get to see whichever one it is."

But the Reverend Mr. Stroud had not waited for all of this speech. He had caught sight of a figure in white coming down the dusty road, and he was but just in time to break opportunely through a gap in the hedge and express his gratified amazement that his arrival should have occurred in such strange coincidence with that of Miss Gladys.

Miss Jolley paced away through the fields unconcerned by his abrupt departure. Her mission having been to direct Mr. Stroud's attention to the fact that while Gladys might be a fairy, her sister was an angel, and further to secure an interest in their future by offering her assistance, she felt that her work was done. Miss Jolley was perfectly positive that the best message Miss Gladys could have for the minister was one of total extinction.

XXI

JOHNNY LANGSTON INTERRUPTS

GLADYS had not come strolling along the road in order to meet the Reverend Milton Stroud. She had taken to solitary walking lately for the benefit of her health—aforesaid health seeming to demand that she should have much opportunity for solitary musings and the recalling of certain mental pictures in which Mr. Stroud did not largely figure.

"I suppose I ought to hope this is an accident," she said. "But you really must not make many such. It will make trouble. You know, whatever sentiments people living at this sanatorium may entertain they must suppress. It's quite against the rules."

"But, my dear Miss Gladys," pleaded the young man. "Surely not all of the time. Such suppression is entirely out of keeping with your character, as I conceive it, and may I venture to say that it is also out of keeping with mine."

"You are a minister," she said, with mischief. "You don't know anything about my character. Don't you know that ministers hardly ever know about the character of people—folks are always on their good behaviour for them."

"I shall be glad to take you on either good or bad behaviour," said the minister. "I'll take your character on trust and you can easily learn mine."

"No, I can't. Very few people know anything about a minister's character; it is so hidden by his reputation."

The minister elevated his eyebrows in mock surprise.

"Such wisdom in one so young is remarkable," he said. "Say some more, please. I like to have you say those bright, mischievous things to me. It is more like you as I believe in you. It is unnatural for you to be so repressed and conservative."

"I am afraid it is becoming natural for me to be repressed."

"With me, you mean. I have wondered at that, too. You are not afraid of me?"

"I am when you are a minister. Not at all when you are a guilty boy stealing through the hedge at exactly the right moment, just by accident."

He laughed cheerfully.

"The accident wasn't intended for you," he declared. "For you I am glad to make clear the design. Why should I conceal from you my desire to steal a few moments of your company? Sometimes I wonder at this peculiar situation. Where do we stand? What am I to you? What are you to me? I am anxious that we shall have an understanding."

"If that is all; if it is just a matter of clearing up a mystery and giving ease to a logical mind, there should be no trouble. Let us suppose that we are patient and nurse; that we——"

"But that isn't it at all. I thought I had made it clear that I must take a wife back to my work."

"Perhaps too clear. It sounds just like a first-class offer of a good position on the staff of a city hospital."

"Did it seem like that to you?" asked the young minister, always honest, and now facing the truth all the more insistently because it was unpleasant. " Perhaps you're right. I haven't said things right at all. And yet when I talked to Mary——"

" When you talked to Mary it seemed that whatever she suggested was exactly the thing," interrupted Gladys, with a little snap which clearly showed the difference between a fairy and an angel.

" Perhaps that was it," admitted Stroud. It was true that Mary's ideas were always exactly the thing. After all, were angels always unattainable? Who might better aspire to one than a minister? But there, he was committed to this young fairy; perish disloyal thoughts!

" Let me try again," he began, bravely. " Let me begin all anew. Let me tell you——"

Honk! Honk! Honk!

The hand which had almost prisoned that of Gladys dropped quickly to its owner's side. It will never be known how prettily the Reverend Milton Stroud, for all his inexperience, might have accomplished a real love scene.

Some one else had watched for this hour of rest—some one who had lingered a few moments in coming, confident that his methods of rapid transit would readily overcome any delay.

The big, grey automobile drew up to the side of the road and Johnny's smiling face looked at them without the least embarrassment—on his part, anyway.

" Miss Gladys, this is most fortunate," he declared. " I have some news of such great importance to you and yours that I feel sure no delay is permissible. You will pardon the interruption, I am sure, Mr. Stroud."

His concluding words were spoken standing in the dusty road with the fore-door of the big car held open in a way that invited the young lady very particularly to a seat next to the driver. Although the invitation did not seem to include the gentleman, it was all done in such smiling harmony that it did not seem discourteous.

The nurse entered the car and the minister turned his thoughts from fairies, to dwell upon angels.

" You will forgive my insistence, I hope," said the chauffeur, as he threw the gear into high speed.

" For this news that is so important to me and mine I suppose I must. What is it, please? "

" I hope it is good news, Gladys. I have been thinking about you every minute. Love is a sacred word and not to be spoken lightly, but I love you more than my lips can speak, almost more than my heart can bear. If I win your love every other prize in life may be stricken out and I shall not even notice their absence. If I can give you——"

" Mr. Langston," the voice was arctic in its rigour, " you were to tell me some news very important to me and mine. This little speech which you seem to have memorized does not interest me. I hope you do not think that I came with you for this."

" But this is important both to you and to yours. It is not news. No; I don't want it to be news to you. It couldn't be news to you. I fear that it can scarcely be news to any one for very long, for it is bursting from me at every pore. Can the bird who has found his mate repress his song? Tell me how and I will——"

" Mr. Langston, this is unwarranted. You rudely interrupt my conversation with a friend and carry me away on pretence of important news, that I may listen only to this!"

"I make no apologies, Gladys. All is fair in the warfare of love, and though I made a mistake at my first opportunity, in failing to be absolutely direct in my statements, I shall never make it again. A love like mine has no excuse to offer for any measure that wins. It is the kind that has made men ride by night through perilous scenes to bear the lady away in spite of everything. It would make me feel much better if Mr. Stroud were a knight in chain armour who would cross my path in battle to the death."

There was no resisting Johnny and his nonsense, even when it was hard to detect what percentage of serious earnestness tinctured the mixture. A slow smile broke the serious lines of the girl's face and she laughed a little, embarrassed laugh.

"You are too ridiculous!" she declared.

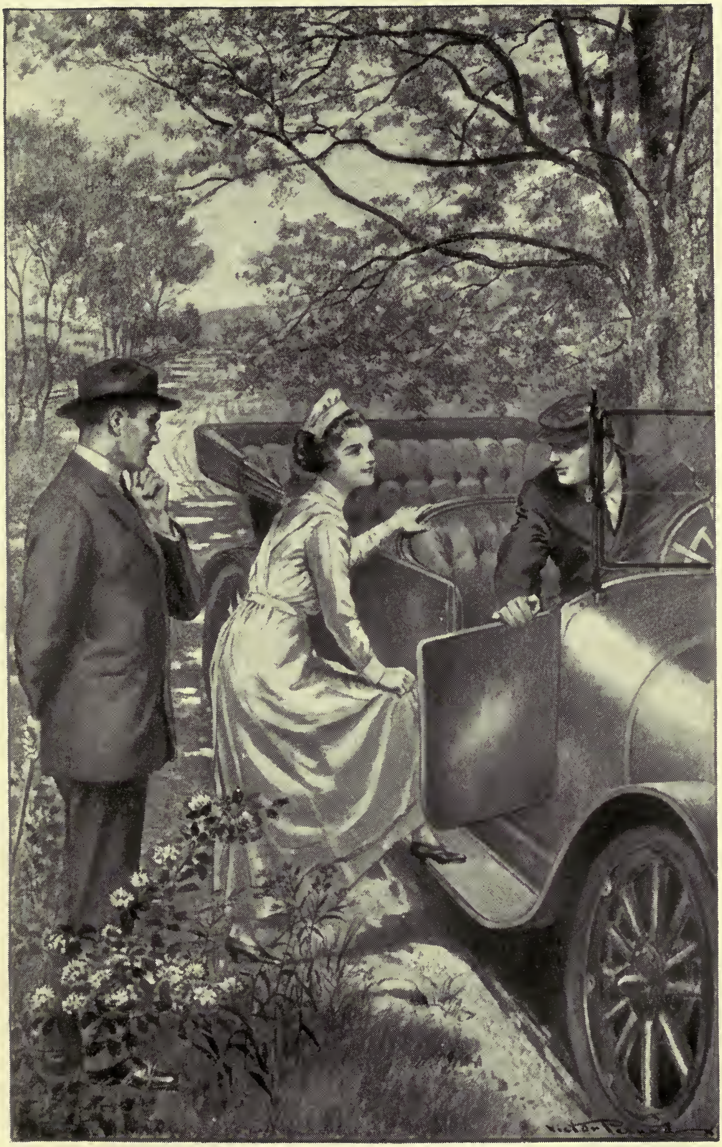
"Say it not, fair lady. I am in deadly earnest. This is a serious matter for me. It is important to you too, and I want you to admit it."

"Supposing I don't think so?"

"I have passed the stage of supposing, Gladys. Look me in the eye and dare to tell me that you have had no thoughts like mine."

"I am afraid that looking you in the eye would disturb your driving."

"It would. You are quite right. It would upset my driving completely. But I'll stop the car. Now, young lady, I have some news to tell that will be real news to you, but first of all you must admit that nothing can be more important than what I have already told you."



Although the invitation did not seem to include the gentleman, it was all done in such smiling harmony that it did not seem discourteous.

" Mr. Langston, I wouldn't joke about such a delicate subject."

" Gladys, I was never more serious in my life. Can anything be more important than the fact that I want you to be my wife?"

The delicate complexion filled with a quick rush of colour. The eyes that had looked bravely into his dropped in confusion. If there was raillery in Johnny's tone there was no response in hers.

" It is too important to speak of, Mr. Langston. Please listen while I say that I must not hear you."

" Gladys, let me tell you my news. I think it may change things for all of us. I hope it won't put you where you will be so great a person that you will forget me. Is your sister in any way entitled to the name of Beamish?"

A blush of embarrassment swept Gladys' face. " What have you heard, Mr. Langston?" she cried.

" It is true then?" he asked.

" Quite true. But we are not ashamed of it. We simply took our mother's name of Standlaws as a matter of convenience in our changed station in life. I am Gladys Beamish and Mary is Mary Beamish."

" There is more to it than you think, for you are evidently ignorant of the Doane will. Your sister inherits millions, under one condition."

" You aren't joking, I'm sure, Mr. Langston."

" No. I am not joking. I have seen the will."

" You say the Doane will. Doane was my father's partner. He must have repented of cheating us, and left money in his will to make up for it. What is the condition?"

" It is a peculiar one. It seems this man Doane has a son. None of the property goes to him directly, but it is all left to your sister on condition that she marry this young man within three years."

"And if she will not?"

"It reverts to a board of trustees for certain purposes which they hold secret."

"Then that is where it will go, for Mary will never marry Henry Doane."

"Is he so objectionable?"

"Some might not think so. I have not seen him for over six years. He was at one time engaged to Mary and we liked him well enough then, but she found something about him which caused her to break the engagement."

"She has not told you of the will."

"I do not even know that she knows of it."

Lawyer Johnny did not enlighten her. Instead he asked another question.

"You feel quite sure that she will not care to meet the conditions?"

"Quite sure. Mary will never marry any man. She has vowed to give her life to her work."

"And is that why she refused Mr. Stroud?"

"Who told you that she did?"

"I know some things without being told—things that mean life and death to me, like this. Mary felt that she couldn't have him, so you should. But that's all a mistake. Mary's the girl he wants. I feel it in every atom of my intelligence. And he shall have her. Let the millions go. Mary is just the wife for a minister and you are just the wife for John Calhoun Langston. Happy day!"

But it was many degrees short of "happy day."

XXII

DOCTOR MIDDANE VISITS THE CASTLE

SOMETIMES a patient's recovery is retarded by his anxiety to get well, sometimes by the amplitude of his accident insurance, and sometimes by reasons of his own. Doctor Middane was not very quick in recovering from his wound. His assistant guessed that he found a sheltered convalescence so agreeable compared with the strenuous outside living stirred up by the criticism of the Latham *Weekly Herald,* that he was not anxious to abbreviate it by too speedy a recovery.

And so it happened "the count" was making some very real and some very satisfactory progress before Doctor Middane, getting outdoors for his first walk, decided to make a visit to The Castle. It is just as well to say that the doctor had no thought of unearthing Luigi. His institution had suffered in his illness and he desired to cast his eyes around The Castle of Cheer and see wherein he might profit. What special attraction did The Castle hold that its capacity was constantly threatened? Might there not be persons there almost ready to try something else, with whom he could have a quiet word? The Hermann cure was well advertised; the very fact that its agent had visited their sanatorium would set some thought in train in the minds of the discouraged ones. When you are sponsor for a thing the success of which demands constant publicity it is not well to emulate the shrinking violet.

Since none of these ideas were really friendly to the institution the doctor took pains to announce that his mission was to tell of the continued wonderful success of the Hermann cure, and to offer to take some advanced cases for demonstration if desired.

He was not received with undue cordiality by the nurses, but Doc Williams gave him the greeting which he had for every visitor.

"We're glad to see ye, Doctor," he assured him. "Glad to have ye pay us a visit. They's some folks here ye shore must be interested in, ye understan' me. How 'bout them patients as he sent on to us, Miss Alice? All on 'em doin' well?"

"Mr. Nein is not doing well, nor Mrs. Swenk. Mrs. Smith is much better since Doctor Goodman gave her the last gas inflation, and Mr. Helm is better to-day. All the others are doing well, too."

If the audience supposed that Doctor Middane would be either embarrassed or contrite at hearing of these unfortunates, whose treatment he had bestowed upon The Castle by the simple process of telling them that they could not come to New Hope without money, they were mistaken.

"I am glad most of them are doing so well," he said, blandly. "I felt sure they were subjects of malnutrition rather than tuberculosis, and that this was the place for them. They needed more home care than my place could give them. I am glad indeed that you are so well able to take care of them."

"Perhaps yo're right," the old doctor agreed, thoughtfully. "We been settled lots longer 'n you an' I suppose we are better able to take 'em. But when we are chuck full we can't take no more, so mebbe ye'd better keep one onc't in a while."

"I want to tell you how very successful the use of the Hermann serum is proving," Doctor Middane said, by way of changing the subject. "I wonder if you would object to having it announced to your people?"

"Our people's putty well satisfied with what they're gettin'," objected the old doctor.

"The particular thing I wanted to announce was that worthy cases without means will be treated free of all charge, when they bring proper certificates as to their condition and their poverty, from the recognized authorities."

"Mebbe ye'd like to have Mr. Nein and Mrs. Swenk come back down to your place," suggested the doctor. "We can give 'em c'tifkits of condition an' I don't reckon they ain't no doubt 'bout their poverty, ye understan' me."

"You misunderstand me, my dear doctor," said the smooth Doctor Middane. "We desire undoubted tubercular cases which will be living demonstrations of the value of our treatment. I hope it will not be too much to ask that you do us the justice of letting our position be known, and I assure you we shall be glad to come to your institution at such times as seem best, and give our treatment to worthy selected cases."

"We'll let ye know when we're ready, ye understan' me," said the innocent old doctor.

"Thank you, indeed!" Doctor Middane chose to ignore any significance which he may have detected in the old doctor's tone. "I am quite anxious to know how you get such splendid success in increasing the weight of your cases. May I see your diet lists?"

"That ain't exac'ly my line, Doctor. I reckon I better let ye talk to the real manager of this institootion, our head nurse. Miss Alice, will ye be so helpful as to send word for Miss Mary to come?"

Mr. Stroud had been a listener to the conversation with Doctor Middane, but he did not stay to make his further acquaintance.

"You don't seem to believe very strongly in the virtue of the great discovery which this man is exploiting?" he observed to the old doctor, as they walked off together.

"I don't," said the doctor.

"Perhaps you are prejudiced," suggested Mr. Stroud, jokingly.

"I reckon I am," the old man agreed. "I reckon I'll allus be prejudiced 'gainst a body 'at claims they've a mighty discovery f'm God A'mighty, an' yet tries to shut it off f'm ever'buddy but folks with money. I don't purtend to know much 'bout the science of it. I leaves that to Dave. He knows, an' he says they ain't nothin' to their cure from the stan'point o' science. But this much I do know, ye understan' me. When that great an' mighty cure is revealed to man, He ain't goin' to let it come through no money-grubber as'll want to put a patent on it, ye understan' me. It'll come through some man like this Pasteur as Davy tells about, big enough to give all he knows to all the world."

"But I don't understand that Pasteur gave his services always without remuneration, and as I recall the doctors whom I have met, I don't know many who follow out your plan of taking no pay excepting what the patient volunteers."

Mr. Stroud made these remarks in a spirit of pleasant raillery, but the doctor showed as much evidence of being vexed as he usually exhibited.

"Ye don't understan' a bit, son,—mighty few of ye seem to understan'. Most all doctors gives their services in a way, but o' course each one does it arter his own way. They has to have money for their offices, an' their help, an' their famblies, an' their automobiles, and so on. Mebbe they'll ask ye five dollars for puttin' some stuff in yore arm, an' ye think it comes putty high, but these things all costs money, an' somebody's got to pay 'em. An' they ain't a one of 'em but 'll do it for nothin' if yo're a poor chap an' can't pay, ye understan' me. An' they ain't a real doctor, anywheres, that'll take a thing as ought to be like a gift f'm God, an' say, 'I'm a-goin' to keep this yere thing hid up all to myself, an' nobody can't use it to cure a poor, sick body, less'n he pays me a royalty on it.' An' it ain't no use for anybody to expec' me to believe that the great, wise, loving God would trust one of His mighty secrets to any feller as'd do no such a thing. No, sir!"

"So this man is a fraud of the worst kind?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say it. He ain't nothing but the agent for this stuff; mebbe he really believes in it; mebbe he thinks he'll do some good. But he needn't expec' to try no such thing at our place, ye understan' me."

The old doctor turned back to the office, which he had just seen Mary enter, his genial face depicting a rather unusual indignation.

XXIII

"YOU ARE THE GREAT DOCTOR MIDDANE!"

AS Doctor Middane waited in the administration building of The Castle, and as sister Mary tripped hastily across from the far cottage to see what was wanted, there was no thought in either mind beyond a mild interest. Six years had made great changes in character both in Mary and Doctor Middane. Just as surely as the one who had chosen the straight and narrow way had developed nobility of purpose and sweetness of character, so the one who had followed the easy path had acquired the shifting viewpoint, blunted perceptions, and pernicious appetites of its travellers. And these changes had produced their effects, as they always will, in delineation of character in feature and in form.

But there was no change that would deceive, for one instant of time, people who had known each other in the relations which six years ago had bound Mary Beamish and Henry Vancil Doane.

And so when, all unprepared, she pushed the door open and walked in, walked right upon him as if she might have been an apparition, she turned absolutely to the colour popularly assigned to such appearances, and Doane, rising halfway from his chair to do honour to the lady, was suddenly stricken by the shock and fell to the floor, even whiter than she, in the first faint of his life.

Well for Mary Standlaws that it was he and not she whose feelings had suffered prostration. Well for her that the old doctor was there to kneel at the man's side, and feel his chest, and say: " Pore fellow. He said this was his fust time out since his sickness. The walk must a been too much for him."

A faint was not a thing to create any great alarm in the hearts of such experienced people. Mary was glad of the opportunity which the administration of remedies gave her for recovery.

" I'll look after him," she volunteered. The others went about their business leaving her in full charge.

" So you are the great Doctor Middane!" she cried, as he returned to consciousness. " Some one said they had heard you were the man, but I refused to believe it."

Since it occurred to her that the woman would prefer to have her presence unknown, and from a very positive feeling that she would be better so, she did not disclose her informant.

" I don't know why you should refuse to believe it," he replied. " My business is a legitimate branch of my profession, which is more than can be said of what your father did."

" My father is dead," she cried. " Do not speak of him. He died realizing his errors and desiring to atone for them."

" You have the opportunity to carry out his wishes now, Mary," he said, eagerly.

" Do you know what his wishes were?"

" I think I do. In his last days he imbibed some ideas which I think were mistaken. The Oxyjuvenator which made his money is an instrument which has done immense good. But because it is simple in make and costs little your father conceived the idea of returning the purchase money to all buyers of whom any record had been preserved. He forgot how much good the majority had received and thought only of the few who were discontented. However, you can now carry out his wishes. Do you know the terms of my father's will?"

"I heard them weeks ago."

"And you did not try to communicate with me?"

"I made no attempt, because I do not intend to comply with his condition."

"Not claim the money! Let all that fortune go to an exploring association! Do you know that I have spent a fortune searching for you to fulfil these conditions?"

"I am sorry, but I can never meet the conditions of that will."

"You were willing enough to marry me at one time, Mary. Why not now, with millions depending on it?"

"No amount of money will make any difference to me."

"But it does to me. I need that money. Marry me and take half the estate, and I will disappear."

"Your offer does not tempt me. Nothing that you can say will change me. And what about the wife you have already married and deserted?"

"I did not marry her, Mary. It is a wicked lie. She told you that to break our engagement. Cannot I convince you that I am honest?"

"Posing as Doctor Middane does not convince me."

"Why speak of that? You also are posing under an assumed name."

"It was my mother's. I took it because in our changed condition it was best to cut loose from all old associations. I have nothing to gain or lose by it."

"You can go back to your old associates with more wealth than ever. Won't you give me a chance?"

"Not to marry me. You have a chance to be honest if you wish. Close the institution you are using to cheat poor unfortunates whose pitiful state of health should stir the pity of even as hard a man as you. But even then, I would not marry you."

"But just for a day, Mary. Just long enough to prove the will. Then you can keep half the money, and I will go away where you will never see me again."

"Doctor Middane," it was the head nurse speaking now. "You are sufficiently recovered to return to town. I will have the carriage sent to the door for you. You will excuse me. I have work demanding my attention."

"I can go the way I came," the doctor cried, furiously. He opened the door and strode down the walk with a vigour supplemented by an unholy rage. Mary watched him go without sympathy. She had still a shot in reserve had he made further argument, for she had not yet told him that his wife was at The Castle.

The doctor had not gone far from the sanatorium before he found it wise to moderate his pace to a thoughtful walk. At least he had some room for congratulation. His trip had not been unprofitable. Mary was not only alive, but practically in his hands. Her scorn was nonsense. She would soon yield when she saw a little more of him. And he would see that she did see more of him. He was sincere in believing the other woman to be dead, so from his point of view there was no barrier to Mary doing as he wished. He was quite certain that when she had a little time to think of that immense fortune, she would see the desirability of possessing it, and that meant that he would possess it. Meantime he must make the most of his present business, for funds were low since his illness and he needed money for immediate use, for winter with its extra expense was already biting its first few nips.

As he walked, with these thoughts in his mind, he found himself overtaking a lady who was certainly a patient. It was not a hard matter for the gallant doctor to introduce himself to Miss Jolley, who was inclined to be rather promiscuous in her acquaintanceships.

"Been visiting The Castle, have you?" she said. "That's a sanatorium for you! Most any of you doctors could get pointers from there, I guarantee."

"Indeed we could," agreed Doctor Middane. "Indeed we could, my dear lady."

"You certainly could," said Miss Jolley. "And without me being your dear lady, either."

"You have been a long time there?" asked the doctor.

"Quite some while. I've been a slow case; but I'm doing well now. Doctor says the important thing is to make it thorough. One or two months isn't enough. We like it, anyway."

"You have some fine patients, though no very wealthy ones, I take it?" observed crafty Doctor Middane.

"You don't take it from me," objected Miss Jolley. "Why, we have an Italian count so important that he never mixes with common people at all, and so rich that he has to have a special vault to keep his money."

"Remarkable!" exclaimed the doctor. "What is his name?"

Sad to say, Miss Jolley did not know; but being loath to make such a confession she seized upon a despicable subterfuge.

" He doesn't go by his real name—one o' these incognature's noblemen, you know. He's afraid he might get so much attention he couldn't get well."

" And you never see him? "

" Most of us don't. But me speaking Italian—took it two terms in a settlement night school—I've been to call. He's a real, pleasant nobleman; and rich—words can't express his riches! "

Doctor Middane turned a good many things in his scheming mind as he strode on to Latham Centre at more rapid speed. He must get hold of this Italian count. He would be fine picking and the finest kind of advertising. There was an Italian not a thousand miles away whom he could employ to go to The Castle and speak such Italian language as no two terms ever gave to the most apt student. And while he was looking after the Italian count he could keep one eye, at least, on the head nurse.

XXIV

THE "EYETALIAN" TACKLES A JOB OF WORK

IN this middle western country winter is very real —by spells. Days and weeks will go by with no more than an occasional nippy morning, a cloudy sky or a cold rain. Optimistic young folks will begin to talk about having an open winter this year; pessimistic old folks will putter about, pinching open the fruit buds to see their condition, and making dire predictions of what will happen to the fruit if this keeps on; the weather-wise will shake their heads and tell you that it can't last, but when they have repeated their prediction day after day without any encouragement from the heavens above, they will begin to hedge a little. Then will come a grey morning, a chill wind changing to a cold one, a day of driving, hurrying skies, a few flakes of falling moisture biting into your face, and suddenly winter with its embellishments is really here.

There is not often the steady, silent dropping of calm, big snowflakes; generally the accompanying wind spoils this display. It will come down in white, slanting lines with large interspaces so that you wonder that it covers the earth so quickly from view. Occasionally eddying currents will cause it to whirl in every direction, even upward, so that you might think it to be snowing up instead of down. Sometimes it comes in a fine powder which hardly reveals any flakes, but in pulverized form drives and billows and rushes as if with repeated charges, wherever the wind in its wild gusts sends it.

Soon the earth's surface is changed, all its unsightliness is blotted out, all its irregularities are levelled, its débris is mercifully cloaked, it shows a pure, white, even mantle, like a snowy counterpane which has been stretched and pulled and tucked by a clever housekeeper; and you are bound to think of the cloak of charity, which blots out all vice and ugliness, levels all social ranks, and for the time puts just and unjust on an equal plane. Such a visitation did Latham Centre and its neighbourhood receive during the week before Christmas, bringing heightened holiday joy to the prosperous, and an intensified bitterness of poverty to the poor.

It meant no especial hardship at The Castle, for the unpretentious sanatorium had been thoughtfully planned by those who well knew their climatic variations. Its chief detriment was in limiting outdoor pursuits on the part of some of the patients, but it added so to the beauty of the country and brought so much romantic uplift and pleasurable change to the hearts of all patients alike as to compensate for its deprivations.

To those responsible for the work and welfare of the sanatorium, however, it meant greatly increased work. The patients must not be shut off from the fresh air because it was cold; consequently there must be great additions of clothing to conserve the heat of their bodies, and all manner of devices for artificial heat. The central heating plant was so taxed that its care at this time demanded the full attention of their utility man, leaving him no time for the very essential work of cleaning the snow from the broad walks.

Mary Standlaws was glad of the many extra duties which kept her too busy for gloom. She had not been troubled, so far, with further advances from Doctor Middane. She knew the reason of her reprieve. The doctor's wound, superficial though it seemed, had been quite deep in its effects upon him, perhaps because it met little resistance in a body which had long given itself to indulgences. His visit to The Castle and the long walk home had resulted disastrously, and he had been kept to his bed ever since. But certain reports from Latham Centre indicated that he was better, and Mary felt that he was to be feared. The active direction of the sanatorium was upon her shoulders, however, and its complex affairs left little time for worry.

Mary did not know that she was opening her doors to the enemy when she welcomed so cheerfully an Italian labourer from Latham Centre, who desired any kind of honest work. Here was her opportunity to relieve the burdens of their overworked utility man. There was Mr. Bissington Jones shovelling snow this very minute—work sufficiently hard that no patient should be expected to do it, and to but a few could it be allowed.

Bissington Jones was a very helpful patient. Others of the improved class might elect to tramp through the snow, or coast on the hills, or look for a clear place to skate; but he found his pleasure, this morning, in putting the walks in such condition that the less robust patients might find a dry place for their limited promenades and the nurses might pass freely between the buildings. He professed a liking for the work. As his shovel lifted the snow in compact cakes and revealed clear pavement beneath, he was not shovelling snow from the walk, he was clearing from his path obstacles and enemies. As the clear space grew trim and neat beneath his strokes he was carving his path to fame. As he lifted a particularly cohesive mass and flung it clear of his way, his cry was "So much for Buckingham!" He was enjoying himself so much that he did not hear the muffled footfall of the nurse, and was unconscious of her presence until she spoke his name.

"You really seem to enjoy this kind of thing," said Mary.

"I do. I always did, but now more than ever. I have been in this haven of rest for getting on a year. I am tired of haven, tired of port; I want to spread my sails to a good strong breeze and be out to meet the buffet of the waves."

"That is very nicely said, Mr. Jones. I believe you are a poet. But, although your sails are probably strong enough, these are days of steam vessels and some parts of your machinery still need repair. I think Doctor Goodman would limit your work."

"Don't think so, Miss Mary; I am just about well. I am no steamer, but a beautiful sailing vessel, and I choose to try my sails this way instead of spreading them before the wind on a toboggan. Stroud is at work the other side of the house. He is a steamer if you like—twin-screw, all modern improvements. Why don't you go and shut off his machinery?"

"Mr. Stroud was an incipient case, you know, Mr. Jones. He is practically well and we are glad to have his help. But I have a man who will release both of you. He is an Italian, but he seems to use very good

English. Perhaps you will do me the favour of showing him how to go to work."

"Most surely I will, Miss Mary. The only thing I like better than working is bossing. Bring on your 'Eyetalian.' After I get him started I will call Stroud over to boss a while."

The "Eyetalian" seemed a fairly intelligent man, although not much of a labourer. Bissington Jones, choosing to work alongside for a time, found that he could easily outdo him. No doubt the explanation was that, as a native of sunny Italy, he was unused to snow. But he could talk, was quite a conversationalist in fact, and after a time Bissington Jones, lawyer, awoke to the conviction that he was being pumped. Objectionable though this might be, his lawyer training kept him from expressing any annoyance or interest; if this was a cross-examination it was his purpose to find out why it was being conducted. It was not until he was satisfied of its object that he threw down his shovel and went to find Stroud.

Jones had liked Stroud from his first appearance. He had taken him up with some sense of patronage at first, but this dissolved rapidly as the acquaintance grew and he realized that his new friend was a leader of unusual qualities. He was now as intimate with him as with Cassius.

"Hullo, Stroud; are you labouring to win the applause of the populace or the individual? You've done enough for this morning, parson; put away your shovel," he counselled. "I'm both surprised and gratified to find a man of such tremendous affairs engaged in such simple tasks."

"You need have no surprise," Stroud replied, resting on his shovel. "I'm doing this because I like it.

A few months ago I felt that the fate of Chicago's best and worst people depended upon my activities. Now the quiet of this place has crept into my blood. I have become detached from the whirl of altruistic activity. I see things going on apparently as well without as with me, and I don't seem to care much if they do."

"That's just a stage in the game, Stroud. You'll pass that in a short time. Then you'll begin to feel an itch to take a lance and break it in the tournament—even though there are attractions here for you, which a man of family can smell and sniff at without temptation."

Stroud disdained the implication and changed the subject.

"Why drop your shovel while work remains to be done? This is a pleasing and a worthy work. Begone with your interruptions."

"No need to do more this morning. Around the corner is an 'Eyetalian' who, Miss Mary thinks, is engaged for the simple purpose of odd jobs."

"Why do you put it in that way?"

"Because I think he has other purposes in view. I can't quite make up my mind whether he is an anarchist or a detective."

"Your humour is wasted on me, Biss. What would an anarchist or a detective want around here?"

"I'm not exactly clear. But, mistaking me for an understudy to the furnace man—for which I entertain no prejudice against him—the gentleman was rather unguarded, and betrayed very clearly the fact that his interest did not lie in odd jobs. I studied his questions with such intelligence as still remains to a former member of the Illinois bar, and my conclusion is that his business centres in two persons. The first of these is our Italian count."

"You think he has some suspicion of his identity and is here to smell him out?"

"Of course I can't say; but his smelling may prove very troublesome to Luigi."

"And who is the other suspect?"

"None other than the head nurse, Miss Mary Standlaws. He certainly displayed an interest scarcely to be expected from an Italian labourer."

"Fudge, man; every Italian has an eye for beauty. There is no mystery about that," said the Reverend Milton Stroud.

XXV

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

IT was yet a couple of days before Christmas when Bissington Jones felt that he had at last fathomed the secret purposes of the Italian. His discovery did not tend to put him in greater harmony with the spirit of the season. It was rather an angry face that he bore into the rest-room where Stroud and Banks were lounging in peaceful conversation.

"I have solved the mystery of the Italian detective," he announced. "I suppose the credit doesn't really belong to me. Our clever little friend, Miss Jolley, put the clue into my hands. She has been interviewing Luigi, it seems; and as she leaves for her home to-day she felt that she must tell me what she had discovered."

"I understood," objected Cassius, "that Luigi's visitors were limited to our own select circle."

"Supposed to be; but it seems Miss Jolley had studied some Italian at one time and was bound to try it on. She doesn't yet know that he speaks English. What she discovered was that she was not the only one to speak Italian to him."

"Ha, ha! The mysterious stranger!" exclaimed Cassius.

"Right. Miss Jolley finds that this man of mystery is tempting our Italian nobleman to leave us so that he may receive the more spectacular, not to say pointed treatment given at the Middane sanatorium, New Hope."

" So that explains it," said Stroud. " The man is no detective but just a runner for the New Hope people. Having heard of our rich Italian count they are taking all this trouble to steal him."

" You don't suppose they suspect his identity? "

" Not in the least. It is not Luigi, the barber, they are after. To them he is an Italian count. He is wealthy. Not only will he pay large fees but his advertising value is immense. It's amusing in a way. But there's another side to it not at all amusing. I don't think you could guess it in a year."

" I don't want to guess," said Cassius. " I shall have temperature if I overwork my mind in that way."

Cassius was not a good patient. He did not lose his lean and hungry look as readily as might be desired, and his temperature was prone to perform acrobatic feats on little provocation.

" It will hurt your feelings," said Bissington Jones. " It did mine. Perhaps I'd better not tell you."

" Go on," commanded Cassius. " Roll it off your mind; especially if the sour look you wear is prompted by it."

" Sour may describe my look but it doesn't my feelings. I am exasperated beyond measure. I can hardly believe it to be true, but Miss Jolley insists that such is the case. This man Luigi, after all we have done for him, actually wants to go to that New Hope place! "

" Wants to put his head in a trap? "

" Oh, no! He believes he is changed so that they won't know him. He's crazy to take that wonderful advertised treatment for which he has already risked life and liberty. He's positively wild to do it."

" Of all the crazy——" began Cassius, but was checked by Milton Stroud.

"It's just human nature," said he. "It's exactly the weakness that makes quack advertising so successful. The people want something spectacular. They want to have a needle stuck into them—or a machine run over them—or a large dose of something nasty from a dark-coloured bottle. The mere fact that Luigi is gaining weight and losing his cough doesn't convince him. He thinks that if he can get the advertised treatment natural means of cure will be transcended. He will be well in a day."

"What shall we do about it?" asked Cassius. "Fire the Italian snooper off the ground and warn Luigi to behave?"

"No good," said Jones. "Miss Jolley says that he is so determined to accept the invitation that he will go in spite of everything."

"It will hurt the old doctor's feelings terribly after all his kindness to the fellow," said Cassius. "Look here, Jones. You and I brought that chap here without asking permission of any one. If he's going to cut up in this ungrateful way let's send him packing with as few words as we brought him."

"It would be dangerous," objected Stroud.

"Dangerous in what way?"

"I was thinking of two things: his health and the possibility of their identifying him."

"Not much danger of the latter if he keeps his mouth closed, which he's smart enough to do. You could fix him so they would find it hard to recognize him, couldn't you, Cass?"

"Easy matter," said Cassius. "He is no longer the man he was. His own wife wouldn't know him if she met him on the street. His hollow face has filled out. His tremendous black moustache has disappeared.

His hair, instead of being long and flowing, is now short and curly. All for him to do will be to keep out of sight of his Latham Centre acquaintances. Remember, these sanatorium people never saw him excepting for one brief hour."

"And you will actually let him go?" asked Stroud. "What will the doctor say?"

"It is to save him from having to say anything that we will see that the ungrateful Luigi is shipped," said Cassius. "He will soon get enough of it. Perhaps we can arrange for him to come back then."

"And who will supply the money to introduce this Italian nobleman to New Hope?"

"There will be no money beyond the first payment. That will be two hundred dollars which is the exact sum we have been holding, ever since Luigi threw it at our feet the night he came. It is right and proper that he should now return it."

"I would gladly save the old doctor's feelings, but I'm far from sure that your plan is the best way to do it," Stroud still objected.

"We'll take the responsibility," said Cassius. "Johnny Langston will help and will give an eye to Luigi after we get him shipped. He's a good scout, is Johnny, and he'll appreciate the joke on the New Hope people. Luigi must go, and the good, kind doctor at New Hope shall have him for a Christmas gift."

XXVI

MUZZLED GERMS

ALTHOUGH the old doctor made no pretence at the executive administration of the affairs of The Castle, it was rather a bold step to send a patient away without consulting him at all. But even as Luigi had been received without counsel with him, so was he sent away. There were reasons why schemes, plots, and other affairs of duplicity were considered unfavourable topics for discussion with Doc.

" So your Italian count has gone," remarked Bissington Jones, innocently, in an endeavour to discover his feelings on the subject.

" Yes, he's gone; an' that ain't to say he's altogether well, ye understan' me. I'm wishin' he'll come to no harm."

" I suppose you are always sorry when one of us leaves you," suggested Bissington.

" Sorry when ye leave too soon. Not sorry when ye stay long 'nuff so yo're all tinkered up 'bout as well as we can do, an' got yore fightin' germs all workin agen the disease."

" I'm sorry to hear you talking that way, Doctor. I hoped there was one doctor with enough sense not to be afraid of the germ bogey."

" Who's sayin' I'm afraid? "

" You sound like it. All you doctors are afraid of germs."

" Not me, son. The disease germs used to trouble me a hull lot, I'll admit. Sounded right careless o' God to let things o' that kind be a-stalkin' round His universe seeking who they might devour. Quite a while 'fore I'd allow anything of the kind. Thought mebbe 'twas some insult the ol' devil was a-tryin' to put on Him an' the best thing I could do was to say 'tain't so, ye understan' me. I certainly didn't want to b'lieve in 'em."

"But you do now?" asked Bissington. "What converted you?"

"Well, they showed me the pictures o' some on 'em all finished up, cabinet style, a dozen for Christmas an' one big un throwed in to go on the mantel, an' it seemed like they wasn't hardly no gettin' around it, ye understan' me. I 'low I was plumb mis'able for a while every time I heard mention o' germs an' that was putty often.

"Then comes Davy home for his vacation, an' I says to him, says I: 'Tell me 'bout these yere germs, Davy. 'Pears like the ol' devil slipped one over on God a-makin' of 'em to pester the whole universe. You a-studyin' in Germany,' I says, 'you cert'ny orter know what they is to germs or germ theeries.'

"Well, Davy, he jest laughs. He ain't never much of a han' to talk, Davy ain't. 'Of course, ye know they's germs to everything, Dad,' he says.

"'Yes,' says I, 'germs to diphthery an' typhoid an' consumption an' the rest o' them things, of course.'

"But Davy ain't satisfied at that. 'Yes,' says he, 'an' germs to yeast an' vinegar an' this an' that, an' even germs to a good man like Doc Williams.'

"'Why, they ain't no germs on me, Davy,' says I, kind o' skeert.

"'I reckon they wouldn't be no Doc no other way,' says Davy. ‘Germs means life,’ says he. ‘Everything what lives is a germ or has been one. They’s germs an’ germs; though what people mostly thinks of when they talk of germs is bacteria. Even these yere bacteria ain’t all bad by no means. They’s ’bout four thousan’ kind as ye can see under the mikerscope an’ call by their christened names an’ surnames if so be yo’re right well ’quainted,’ says he. ‘But even out o’ these ’tain’t only some half a hundred or thereabout as has anything to do with disease,’ says he. ‘An’ it ain’t proved but what them has some good function some place or other, but they cert’nly ain’t wanted inside of us.’ Of course, bein’ a lawyer an’ a man o’ learnin’, this ain’t nothin’ new to you.”

“Doctor, I’ll just own up. I don’t know a thing about it and I rather think most lawyers are about as ignorant as I.”

The doctor laughed with the glee of a child.

“Sometimes it makes me feel better ’bout what I don’t know when I finds you fellows out—you men as has such splendid language an’ terrible important looks, an’ then not knowin’ no more’n jest ordinary people, wunst ye leave yore reg’lar track. Well, Davy told me a whole lot more’n that. It seems they’s good germs as fights the disease germs; jest opens a little an’ swallows of ’em up. He got out his mikerscope an’ fixed up some specimens, an’ I declare I seen ’em a-doin’ it myself.

“‘Why,’ says he, ‘germs—disease germs—they can’t do nothin’ to ye if yore own germs is on the job, ye understan’ me. That’s why ye’ve lived along all these years. You ain’t never been ’fraid o’ germs. Years an’ years you lived ’thout knowin’ they was no sech thing. But all this time yore good germs was a-takin' care of ye, an' now ye knows 'bout 'em it'll be jest the same way.'

"I've figgered consid'ble 'bout germs since then an' I've got my own idees 'bout it. They mightn't do no good for a up-to-date lawyer but they's good enough for old Doc."

"Now, Doctor, don't draw into your shell," urged Jones. "You know that I believe your medical knowledge to be equalled by few and surpassed by none. Tell me those ideas."

"Well, s'posin' yo're good an' healthy; not dissipatin' none an' keepin' yore house in good order. Along comes a germ, lookin' for a chanct to buy a home on the 'nstallment plan. S'posin' he walks in at yore door he gits such a welcome f'm yore agents 'at he c'ncludes all he needs is a nice little burial lot. But s'posin' he'd went on to some young sport who'd ben wastin' his substance—his germ-destroyin' substance—in riotous livin' for months an' years. He don't meet no opposition, an' it don't take him no time to raise fust one fambly an' then hull colonies of famblies, for these yere germs jest natchully beats guinea pigs for perducin' their kind. Well, even this dissipated fellow's got a show. His own germs, what's been weakened an' wasted, rallies together an' there's quite a fight on. This yere fight as goes on is what we call disease—mebbe the doctor puts a label on it marked typhoid. S'long as the young fellow's germs is fightin' he has a good show. It's too bad, but they is times when some fool doctor gits so disturbed 'bout the activity his germs puts up that he begins dosin' 'em with somethin' 'at catches 'em below the belt an' puts 'em to the mat. But leave 'em alone an' they prob'ly wins out, an' they've got so strong in this fight that that p'ticler kind o' disease germ can't never camp in the same woods with 'em again, not as a general thing, ye understan' me."

"Good enough!" remarked Bissington Jones. "But if we are all equipped with automatic destroyers why give them any thought?"

"Yore destroyer might slip a cog some day. No good runnin' into danger. It's good to know jest 'nuff 'bout 'em so ye won't be careless like in yore habits an' so you'll know 'nuff to keep yore autymatic destroyer fired up."

"And no need to be scared of 'em?"

"No, sir. These yere germs o' consumption, now. They's plenty of 'em. Fellow says he won't come nigh The Castle 'cause he's skeert of 'em. Shucks! Up here at The Castle we got 'em runnin' on chain an' muzzled at that. They don't bite nobody 'cause we knows just how to keep 'em down. Prob'ly same feller rides in a palace car where they's forty million thousand of 'em sleepin' with their feet right on the parlour sofy, an' the on'y thing 'at saves him is his own germs bein' there, all unbeknownst to him, settin' right up with chips on their shoulders a-lookin' ugly.

"Dave says to me, he says, 'Prob'ly most growed-up folks has fought it out with consumption germs some time or other, an' has won out. It doesn't mean that they can't be tackled again, but they got so strong winnin' out, they ain't by no means a likely field for germs o' that nature,' ye understan' me."

And as he walked away, Bissington Jones realized that he still did not know what the doctor thought of Luigi.

XXVII

A CHRISTMAS GIFT FROM THE CASTLE

AS is well understood by all diplomatic people, the proper day for presenting Christmas gifts is the twenty-fourth of December. This rule is especially valuable in the case of the unexpected gift. The recipient may rub the label off that one of his assortment of presents which has least enchanted the fancy and make it do return duty, if he so desires; but he is not held to such action so inflexibly as when the unlooked for gift comes the day after, and finds the stores all closed. It is still possible for him to mingle with the late shoppers, many of them also engaged in buying something to save their faces. The expected Christmas gift is a cheerful joy, the unexpected one should be still more so—alas, that in so many instances it is, instead, an embarrassment.

The gift sent by The Castle of Cheer to New Hope was duly delivered shortly after nightfall. The management of New Hope did not look upon it as a Christmas gift, with the customary obligations, and made no effort to reciprocate. They supposed it was merely a wealthy patient whom they had won over to their care and control by their own cleverness. They did not know that the delivery was made personally by John C. Langston, using his own automobile as a taxicab, or it might have occurred to them that it would be well to scrutinize both gift and giver.

Mr. Langston, having done good and expeditious work, turned his car back in the direction of The Castle, possibly with the feeling that one good turn deserves another. On the principle that anything to cheer the patient is worth while, all holidays were well celebrated at The Castle of Cheer. But Christmas was the crowning joy. The old doctor began his celebrating early and continued it late. To-night he had actually agreed to ride in the Langston automobile, since it covered a lot of ground in a short time, and he had much ground to cover and very little time in which to do it.

When Johnny drew up at the door of the office he found a good load of baskets and bundles, which he carefully helped place in the car.

"Now you need some help, Doctor," he suggested, thoughtfully. "Anything loose on the seat of an automobile quickly gets jolted off, unless some one is there to hold on to it. We shall be back in an hour. Couldn't some of the girls be spared that long?"

"Mebbe they could," the doctor allowed. "I don't reckon it makes any difference who?" he added, with a twinkle in his eye.

"It does a little, Doctor. This machine knows Miss Gladys pretty well and always acts nicely for her. I've always told you the truth, you know, Doctor. I would prefer Miss Gladys."

"Very well. We can be a little extry joyful it bein' Christmas, ye understan' me. Mebbe Mary can go, too."

But if Johnny imagined that everything was to come his way he was disappointed, for it was sister Mary who chose to sit with the driver. Perhaps Mary felt that this young man's opportunities already had been too favourable.

Johnny thought that he knew Latham Centre with great thoroughness, but that night, under the doctor's guidance, he became aware that the little town was rapidly acquiring slums and holes such as graced much more advanced municipalities, and such as he had not supposed could so soon begin to fester.

It was very evident that many needy families would have had little Christmas but for the visit of the grey car. Stop after stop did they make, and at each place one or the other of the nurses lightened the car of a basket or bundle. At last there was only one bundle and basket left.

"Them's to go 'bout a mile 'tother side o' town," said the doctor. "Who d'ye reckon they's for?"

"Some one who needs them, no doubt," replied Mary, talking over the back of the seat.

"Yes, but ye'd never guess 'at I found the party right in our place. It's the family o' the Italian ye've had workin' there. I asked him did he have a wife an' children, an' he sure did, an' very much they needed somethin'.'

Johnny had turned the car into a by-road, where the travelling would have been bad, but for the snow which had filled up its usual ruts. Some distance from the road stood a group of trees, and behind this they found a long, low farmhouse, which had evidently put its good days by long since. One dim light burned in a rear room, probably the kitchen.

"This is the last place," said the doctor. "I believe I'll go in here with ye an' git warm afore we start back. I'm beginnin' to feel the chill."

"Let's all go in," suggested the diplomatic Johnny, reaching back for the basket and bundle which remained.

A tired, disorderly Italian woman, who had very little English, was doing her best with two small children. Stretched on an old carpet in front of the stove lay three of varying diminutive degrees, their troubles swallowed in the great pacifier. Recognizing the doctor from his previous visit, the woman looked up with the feeble imitation of a smile. Johnny set the heavy basket and package on the table.

"Open it," instructed the doctor. "They's somethin' for every one, show her."

Gladys, her sunny face deeply affected by the misery she saw, began eagerly to lift out the little articles of clothing. The woman managed to dispose of her burdens and came eagerly forward; but it was not to inspect the clothing. Grasping the delicate, ministering hands in both of the bony talons which formed so strong a contrast, she covered them with kisses, as she fell to her knees and called in tearful praise for the blessings of all the saints to descend upon the dear angel.

His eyes wet with tears, Johnny said a deep Amen, all the emotion of his generous nature responding to the appeal.

Out again in the quiet night, they picked their way back along the path of the gleaming headlights. Johnny helped the old doctor to his seat and tucked the robes partially around him.

"Now, Miss Mary," he called. "It's your turn to take the place of honour," and as he held out his hand with his compelling smile, there seemed little else to do. He snugly pushed the other end of the robes around her and commanded them both to sit well back and keep warm.

"And how about me?" inquired Gladys.

"You are young," said Johnny, cheerfully. "You can keep the driver company."

It is surprising with what safety intimate conversation may be carried on in the front seats of an automobile, without regard to those in the rear, especially if they also are in conversation. And the safety is still greater if the chauffeur inadvertently opens the muffler. Johnny felt as securely private as if the doctor and sister Mary had been left with the Italian woman.

As he started his car he dropped a little package—a very small package indeed—into the lap of his companion.

"Your Christmas present from me," he said, in matter-of-fact, business-like voice. "Open it. You can't see it perhaps, but you can feel it, and you'll catch a sparkle even in the dark."

She did not need to open it. She did not want to open it. Knowing well what it was, she had no right to open it. But she did. More than that, under the robe, for just one wee fraction of a second, she slipped it on her finger. But of course Johnny had no way of knowing that.

"It's very good of you, Mr. Langston. But I'm so very, very sorry. I'll have to give it back, you know. I can't keep it."

"It's yours. You've got to keep it." The tone was quite determined.

"I thought you understood," she said, giving a quick, anxious glance to the back seat, where sister and doctor were in quiet conversation. "I thought I had made it clear to you."

"You did. So did my own feelings. So did every evidence in human nature. Everything has made it clear to me that my claim is good."

"Mr. Langston! Don't you know why I've been keeping out of your way all these weeks?"

"I can guess. It's through some mistaken idea that you must offer yourself as a sacrifice."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do. You think that if you keep Mr. Stroud dangling after you——"

"Mr. Langston, you are very rude. Mr. Stroud has not had a private conversation with me since the day you interrupted us."

"I beg your pardon and I thank you for telling me. That makes me feel all the more convinced. What I meant was that as long as Mr. Stroud paid you attentions he would leave your sister alone and she would not be compelled to tell him her secret."

"Mr. Stroud does not know that my sister has a secret."

"But he will know very soon. Every one will know. The man to whom she sent for a copy of the will is following the matter up so that he may get his share of the reward. It will interest the public for a day or so to know of the unusual condition of the will and your sister's reluctance to fulfil it, so the newspapers will be sure to make it prominent."

"Perhaps you don't know, Mr. Langston, that Mary could not fulfil that condition even if she so desired."

"Why not?"

"You know that the young man Doane is the person who passes here as Doctor Middane."

"I learned the fact recently."

"Well, he already has a wife and she is a patient at The Castle."

" What a remarkable coincidence."

" It is not exactly coincidence. She came here because she had heard a rumour that Doane was here. When she went to the place she saw another doctor and he put her out because she had no money. Mary found her on the street and took her in. But it was only recently that we learned that Doane and Middane were the same."

" I suppose it never occurred to your sister that she might be doing a great thing for herself in taking in this poor woman."

" No. How would it do her any good? "

" Only that if she can prove this woman's marriage to Doane she thereby shows that the condition named in the will is impossible and may be able to continue in the inheritance without regard to such a condition."

" Oh, Mr. Langston, do you think it may be possible? "

" I think there is rather a possibility."

" And may I tell her? "

" You must do so at the first opportunity; and if it brings you any good fortune, please don't forget the willing slave who suggested it."

" Mr. Langston, I am sure you are a very good friend to us. I will tell my sister. And now we are getting near home, you must please take back your present."

" I will take it back for a little while," Johnny agreed. " But if you won't take it as a Christmas gift, I warn you that it will be your valentine."

And although she protested, her protestations were not overmuch.

XXVIII

"GET ME THE MONEY"

IN these days Lawyer John C. Langston sat so often at his desk, spending precious moments, greatly in demand for legal purposes, in brown studies (possibly they should be called golden studies), in which prominently figured a nurse and her uniform, that when he suddenly raised his eyes, and saw at his desk just such a uniform, a nurse snugly encased therein, he was inclined to pinch himself in an effort to bring back his scattered faculties from the land of dreams. But, after all, it was not *the* nurse. It was her sister, Mary.

"I have called to see you on business, Mr. Langston," she explained, after Johnny had courteously seated her. "My sister has told me the things you confided to her. You know so much about this matter that I want to tell you all, and get the benefit of your good judgment, which I am sure will be very helpful to us."

In his business affairs the young lawyer always preserved such dignity as became a member of a learned profession and a representative of a firm which ranked high in that profession.

"My services and those of our firm are unreservedly at your disposal, Miss Standlaws. I hope that I shall advise you wisely."

The young lady entered upon her story at once.

"I need not tell you all of the details of this matter, Mr. Langston. My father's wealth, it seems, was accumulated by the manufacture and sale of the Oxyjuvenator apparatus. I think he had plenty of excuse for thinking that it was of value to purchasers, for I understand that he had thousands of testimonials from all manner of people. But he was never proud of it, never talked about it at home, and as a matter of fact I did not know until very recently just what the business was, nor why he felt that he owed restitution. Doctor Doane or Middane has taken pains to let me know that it was the same Oxyjuvenator which he still sells and which Doctor Goodman says is so great a fraud."

"It is undoubtedly a fraud, Miss Mary," Johnny assured her. "The officials of the State Board of Health have given it a careful examination and state that it is nothing more than a piece of metal pipe filled with a mixture of sulphur, sand, and charcoal, absolutely inert and of no more medical value than the rabbit's foot which old Uncle Joe wears around his neck."

"My father made no excuses for himself. He had been unhappy for years. A great flood of light came to him at a time of real conviction and conversion. I was with him as he sat up late in the night planning, with the first real happiness of many years, how he would make restoration to the defrauded. But that night he died."

Tears filled her eyes as the recollection came back to her with overwhelming sorrow. She bowed her head on the desk before her as her grief overcame her.

Johnny, looking at the stooped and gently shaking form, felt a mighty impulse to encircle it with a strong arm and declare that he would smooth her difficulties.

He could somewhat understand how Stroud might fancy himself in love with Gladys; giving one's whole affection to one sister established a curious sense of devotion to the other. But he held himself firmly in check, and in a moment she drew herself erect and wiped her eyes, bravely smiling at her weakness.

"You must forgive me, Mr. Langston. My father was very dear to me. His life had its errors, but he was not the man who could have any happiness under them. My first impulse, after the shock of his death, was a great determination to devote my life to the work he had planned. Then came the blow dealt by his partner. I think there was trickery, but it was fair enough for the courts. Mr. Doane was able to prove that father's sole interest in their partnership was an income which ceased at his death; and we were penniless. I thought at the time that Mr. Doane was deaf to my arguments, but this will shows that something, perhaps it was father's death, made a strong impression upon him. I suppose he made the will during a rather lingering illness, with the fear of death upon him, and realizing the worthlessness of his son, Henry."

"It was asking a great deal to expect you to marry a son whom he no longer trusted."

"Perhaps so," she smiled faintly. "You must remember, though, that he thought he was giving a great deal and probably supposed I would think it a bargain."

"And all this time you were buried in France?"

"So much so that no word reached me of his death. When I was obliged to give up hope of carrying out my father's plans I had just one resolve that I could make, just one thing that I could give. If I could bring nothing to the individuals who had suffered that

I mighty be wealthy, I could at least give my whole life to the poor and the unfortunate, and in so doing I hoped that it would be counted in the fulfilment of my father's purpose. So I and my sister were in France in rigid training. We felt it best that we should cut off all old associations, so we took the name of our mother—dead long before—and avoided all old scenes and locations. I did not know that Mr. Doane was dead until the day that I took the wife of his son into The Castle. She had never been acknowledged as the young man's wife and has not seen him of late years. I supposed she must be mistaken when she said she had heard that he was the New Hope doctor. And then the man came himself and, of course, I knew him."

"What did the woman say then?"

"She does not know, even yet. She did not do well at first and I was afraid to let her have any exciting news. Now she is doing quite well."

"Miss Mary, if she is Doane's wife, I believe you will yet be able to use that money as you wish. The money is yours at this moment. It is willed to you absolutely. If you do not marry young Doane in the three years you are divested of title and it reverts to the three trustees. But if we can show the condition named to be impossible of performance, as we certainly can if we prove that he is already married, the title remains in you and you keep the estate."

"Then I can use the money, until the three years are gone, regardless of the condition?"

"According to the will it does not become a condition until that time. You might as well be using that money to-day, Miss Mary."

"Then I think I will lay claim at once and use it while I can. I do not know that we shall be able to prove that Vance Doane is already married. I thought so until Christmas night. Then this woman came to me—Mrs. Smith, we call her. She has improved a great deal under the compression treatment, and begins to regain the good looks she had as a stage beauty. She looked quite happy and I felt glad to know that I had some share in her improvement. She drew me off into the office, where no one could overhear. 'Miss Mary, I am going to give you a Christmas gift,' she said. 'At first I didn't intend you should ever have it. But you've done so much for me I begin to feel like a new woman. Living here with all you good people I want to do a little good myself and it is in my power to give you an enormous gift—all that great estate that you supposed you could never get. The only thing standing in your way is that Vance Doane is already married. Miss Mary, I want to tell you that I never was his wife at all—there never was any marriage ceremony!'"

"Poor woman! I suppose she thought she did you a vast favour," commented Johnny. "She makes it harder instead of easier. But we can probably prove that she is his common law wife, and that will answer just as well."

"I don't know. I don't want to be unfair even to Vance Doane. But I do know that my father's purpose shall be carried out if I can do it. There are six months yet remaining of the three years, Mr. Langston. Try to get me command of the money right away, and let me see what I can do in the six months."

XXIX

AN ABSURD SCHEME

THE firm of Langston and Langston lost no time in putting into operation the legal machinery required to place Mary Standlaws in possession, if only temporarily, of the Doane fortune.

Johnny was greatly interested in knowing what action this would excite on the part of Doctor Middane. It was possible he would think that Mary expected to fulfil all the conditions of the will, even to accepting the human encumbrance. If so he was soon undeceived, for a letter which he addressed to Mary received a very cold though positive reply. A day or so later Johnny gathered, in a roundabout way, quite definite information as to the course he expected to follow.

The young lawyer sat late in his office, lost in meditation. He was roused by seeing the door in front of him swing gently open, and a tall figure, unrecognizable in the evening gloom, step noiselessly inside, and turn with great caution to slip the lock. Wondering, but not alarmed, Johnny made a swift jump to the electric-light switch and flooded the office with a brilliant glow. Then, as he recognized the intruder, he snapped off his illumination just as quickly, and stretched out his hand in greeting.

"Glad to see you, Count. How are they treating you?"

"But once. But once only do they treat me. Again, they say, in ten days perhaps, or two weeks if I so greatly need it. But once for Luigi is more than plenty. They perform not their treatment very skilful. This injection, it is to hurt. Three days having gone, it is still of a redness and of a hurt."

"Get your witnesses, Luigi. We will sue 'em for malpractice."

"Sue! Is it to sue? Already they say it is I they will sue. I sign the name told me by the honourable Signor to many papers, but always they demand more money. And money I cannot give—not one soldino."

"But you gave them the two hundred dollars, of course? It would never do to miss the chance to give that back."

"My first action handed it forward, with smile most cordial. Clearly they were of a disappointment. 'One thousand!' the young man did say. 'You must pay the doctor one thousand!' Most fortunate I speak no English."

"They certainly believe in the old maxim, 'No pay, no cure!'"

"Cure! Now I know they cure not at all. I come to tell the Signor Johnny I desire not to stay. I am in fear. But yesterday came two of my own people. With the boss—the Signor Doctor—they talk greatly. They scheme something crooked."

"Why should they plot against you? They surely are willing to wait a short time until that money from Italy comes."

"It is not I they would hurt. They think nothing of me. As I sit on the side porch I hear them speaking Italian so no person shall understand.

"They are to do a job for the Signor Doctor—the word, it is kidnap. It is a young lady."

Johnny became very attentive.

"How much did you hear? Did they give the young lady's name, or say where she lived?"

Luigi shook his head.

"None. I listen hard, for I desire not luck to the Signor Doctor; but nothing do I hear. Only it is to bring money enormous—each man will get so much as a year's wages. But first they must do the work and they must wait until the Signor Doctor gets the money. This mostly is their talk."

It was a puzzle to Luigi, but Johnny was able to make a very good guess at the situation. Doctor Middane was anxious to make Mary his wife for many reasons. He probably thought that he loved her and he certainly loved the fortune which she represented. He did not consider his past relations with Mrs. Smith as a barrier. There had been a time when he had won Mary's trust and he was sufficiently vain to feel that he could win it again with a good opportunity. It was not likely that he expected to obtain a marriage by absolute insistence, but he wanted the opportunity to present his claim without interference. Therefore he would have her carried away. Once let his personality overcome her reluctance sufficiently to gain her consent to a marriage, even though it lasted but for a day, and at least the fortune was safe.

These conclusions came quickly to his legal mind, trained to fathom the motives of those who sought by devious processes to evade the law.

"I think I know what the rascals are up to, Luigi. You cut back there now, so the people won't miss you. We want you to stay there for just a few days."

"It shall be as Signor Langston says," Luigi conceded, with a fine attempt at cheerfulness. "This doctor shall inject some more of his stuff that did so irritate, if it is so desired."

"Yes, we want you to stay a few days, anyway. Perhaps they won't give you any more treatment if you don't remind them of it. I'll go out to The Castle to-night and tell them to reserve a place for you when you come back."

It took no very weighty reason to induce Johnny to make the journey to The Castle. There was a reason (not very weighty by standards of avoirdupois) always there, however, and he hoped to see her to-night, though his particular object was to see and take counsel with his brother attorney, Bissington Jones, for whose logical mind he entertained great appreciation.

Strangely enough, Bissington himself opened up right on the subject.

"I've been wanting to see you, Langston," said he. "I don't want to alarm any of the good people here, but you are their business man, and I want you to arrange in some way to fire that Italian Miss Mary hired."

"Sure thing. You speak the word, the deed is done. You don't mind telling me just how the rascal has hurt your feelings?"

"He hasn't done a thing to my feelings excepting on general principles. The way he puts up a bluff about his work would ulcerate the feelings of a blind man. But it's something worse than that."

"Speak out, my tragic friend. Let me hear the worst at its baddest."

"It's bad enough, Langston; and I'm not joking."

"I beg your pardon. Excuse my levity. I grew up that way. When I was at school, old Uncle Jimmy used to say I was a regular Leviticus."

"Your characteristics have suffered no great change. But let me tell you about this fellow. I was out walking yesterday afternoon, and, feeling pretty good, had gone two or three miles. Coming back I shortened things by cutting across a pasture. Just as I reached the main road who should come along but Miss Mary. I was about to push through the hedge and offer to walk with her, when I noticed a distressed look that made me conclude she would rather be alone. While I waited who should turn into the road but——"

"Hold on. I'll tell you who it was," interrupted Johnny. "It was the Italian."

"You're right. Though it isn't much of a guess after I'd told you I had a complaint against him."

"That isn't why I guessed it, though. I've had some revelations made to me that shine right into this situation, and I see I'll have to tell you the whole story and get your advice. Of course it's just between us."

It was not a long story the way Johnny told it.

"It makes it all clear," agreed Bissington. "This man is one of the outfit. I don't suppose he had any idea of doing anything, yesterday; just wanted to find her usual walks. They would scarcely be so foolish as to attempt to carry her off from under our noses. They plan to decoy her away first."

"I suppose the best thing is to tell her, even if it does give her a scare. She will then be on her guard, and can stay around home."

"Stroud knows all about the situation," suggested Bissington as the minister came into view; "let us get his opinion on the matter. I have two or three good guesses that he will be as much interested in this as any one."

Stroud was interested, also very angry. His wrath was gigantic. More and more of late had he made up his mind that here was a pearl of great price; more and more had his heart told his mind that all his possessions would not be too much to pay for her. He knew well enough that he was now lingering at The Castle for the benefit of other organs than those concerned strictly in the process of respiration. He could find no words to express his rage at the impudent effrontery of this outrageous quack.

"Let him try his plan while I am here!" he cried. "From this time she shall be under my observation every moment."

"Won't make such an awful change in your daily programme, will it?" asked Bissington, innocently.

Stroud ignored the hint.

"It is absurd that a man should contemplate such an act in this day," he exclaimed.

"It seems so to us," agreed Johnny. "But the Italian citizens who dwell around the oil-wells are not educated to our views. So far as Middane is concerned he doesn't care about its absurdity if only he can get the lady where she will listen to reason. He probably thinks it the only way to keep millions of dollars from slipping out of his reach. The question is, do we tell the lady or do we not?"

"She must be told," Stroud affirmed with emphasis. "She is a resourceful, admirably balanced woman, one equal to the greatest heroism. I have never met one whom I would more readily trust in an emergency."

"Or even without any emergency, perhaps," suggested Jones. "We admit your views, Stroud, but the question is, will she make a fuss about it? It seems to us a good plan to let these fellows go ahead and run themselves into a noose. If we betray our knowledge they will simply deny everything and change their plans."

"That is true, no doubt. But she will readily understand the necessity of following your advice. She is a remarkably quick-witted, clever woman, with a mind in some ways equal to that of a man."

"And in other ways superior, no doubt," corrected Jones. "On your advice we will tell her."

Mary was surprised and indignant as Stroud that such an outrageous plan should be contemplated, even by Middane. Having more sense of humour, however, it needed but a short time for her indignation to pass into amusement as she contemplated the safeguards she could summon.

"The poor man must be going crazy," she declared. "I suppose he is so anxious about that money that he is losing his mind."

"I can see reasons why he may consider himself justified," said Johnny. "I'm not so sure that he's losing his mind."

"I wish he'd try to carry me off," said Gladys. "It's awfully exciting."

"Don't joke about it," interrupted Johnny. "It isn't as little a matter as you think. There are people around here who have done such things and can be hired to do them again. You must not allow yourself to be off your guard for a moment, Miss Mary. Meantime we will try to find out more definitely what they plan to do and catch them in their attempt."

"I shall not be here very long, because of course I shall have to go to Chicago to dispose of some of that fortune. When will it be, Mr. Langston?"

"A very few days, now; and since Middane knows that, as well as I, he will not long delay his operations."

"I appoint you as my bodyguard, Mr. Jones," she announced.

"I speak for Stroud to be first lieutenant," said Bissington, graciously.

But Milton Stroud already had chosen his rank.

XXX

WILLING TO BE KIDNAPPED

WAITING for an explosion is thrilling work, even though confident that you are safely beyond the danger line. The succeeding days of suspense were not without anxiety to the watchers, for each one realized that there were certain serious elements which put this plot outside of the realm of comic opera, no matter how ludicrous they chose to regard it. They all had expected immediate action and the suspense was trying.

The explanation of any seeming laxity lay in the fact that circumstances lately transpiring had made Middane a very busy man. His cure—his serum—with the " Made in Germany " trademark to guarantee its high rank, had been repudiated by German physicians. One of them (one whose name had been used perhaps a trifle incautiously) had actually come all the way to America to repudiate any claim of his indorsement. The newspapers had volunteered a disturbing lot of comment, very little of which could be considered first-class from an advertising standpoint, and some of which had really been inconsiderate. It became necessary for Doctor Middane to make frequent trips to headquarters in Chicago and occasional visits to his superiors in New York. These things made great demands on his time and necessarily hampered the fulfilment of his intentions toward Mary.

The embarrassment of Doctor Middane was doubly joyous to Doc Williams. His genial kindness was not impaired by the fact that he could rejoice in the exposure of a humbug. But his chief joy lay in the circumstance that this exposure gave him a visit from his beloved David. The vessel which brought the great German doctor, to expose the Hermann serum, brought also his assistant, Doctor David Williams, who had spent some years with him in his laboratories, and, being an American, was just the man he needed in this matter. So everything was joyful to the old doctor, and the sky was a little bluer, the snow a little whiter, and the atmosphere a little lighter because David was coming home.

Luigi had become very weary of his stay at New Hope. His money persistently failing to arrive, he was beginning to be regarded by its managers as a very suspicious character, and, but for his advertising value, which was enhanced as adverse criticism grew, would have been expelled with ignominy. He carried the situation off in a way that was really admirable, but it was with great joy in his heart that he saw its approaching end and was able to seek Lawyer Langston with some definite news.

"It is for to-morrow that all is to be done," he assured the young lawyer. "The Signor Doctor from Chicago arrives this morning. He desires hurry. He must to Chicago return this very next day. There are reasons why he should prove that he is absent when this work, it is done. The men hired—they do the work—this very next day."

Johnny had by no means lost enthusiasm for the plan whereby he hoped to take the conspirators in the act and thus put a decisive end to their plotting. He hurried out to The Castle to acquaint those interested with the expected development. Before he left, their arrangements were such that it seemed hardly possible that the Italian and his confederates could escape. Mary returned to Latham Centre with him to arrange certain legal matters concerning the responsibilities which she would so soon assume.

Mary was still absent when the early evening threw its shades about The Castle of Cheer. A message for her, brought by an Italian, was presented to Gladys. It was a piteous note pleading for attention to a case, a short distance from the institution, to which Mary had given previous service. Gladys would have felt no alarm had it not been presented by an Italian. At once her suspicions flew to the kidnappers, and the possibility that they were making their attempt a day early. She was in great perplexity. Mary being absent, Stroud and Jones, relieved of their charge, had gone away for exercise. She knew not with whom to consult. Suddenly her thoughts turned to Mrs. Smith, the only other person in the place who had been taken into their confidence. She was easily found.

"Oh, Mrs. Smith," she cried; "they have come to kidnap Mary and she is not here!"

She thrust the note into the woman's hand and quickly explained about the Italian and her suspicions.

"It looks that way," Mrs. Smith agreed. Her face showed perplexity for but a moment. "It's an awful pity to disappoint 'em," she declared. "I know what we'll do. Let me take Mary's place. I'd trade all I ever expect to own just to see Vance Doane when he finds out."

"It would be funny," Gladys laughed. "But of course we couldn't do it. What shall I tell this Italian?"

"Don't tell him anything. Leave me go fix myself a little and you get me your sister's long coat and little bonnet and they'll never know the difference."

"But you couldn't, Mrs. Smith!" cried Gladys, bewildered. "They might hurt you and you aren't strong enough to take any chances."

"Don't you believe I'm not, dearie," the lady assured her. "I'm just about strong and well. I look and feel as well as ever. All's the matter with me is I'm just about dying to get away from this safe, dull, little heaven and out into the limelight again. Vance Doane ain't so bad. I'm not afraid of him. I just want him to see how I look right now. You let 'em go ahead and kidnap me."

She had hurried Gladys to her room while speaking, and already was busy with her toilet. Mrs. Smith had not been a promising patient. Her condition had been quite advanced and she had not responded readily to ordinary treatment. As her trouble was confined to one side, Doctor Goodman had put this lung to rest by the process of compression with nitrogen gas. This had given a good measure of success and after its application she had improved in temperature and in weight and had begun to renew some of the good looks which had made her an attractive figure on the stage. Now she was quite willing to be kidnapped. She had not seen the proposed kidnapper for many years, and his last dealings with her had been far from kind. But she did not forget the period when she had exercised upon him an indisputable spell. With the improvement in health she felt that her charm had returned. She had no dearer ambition than to try its powers upon him once again. She had a secret feeling that it would be quite irresistible.

When Gladys, still protesting, appeared with the nurse's coat and bonnet, the actress was ready to complete her make-up for the greatest part she had ever played. The years of misery had printed lines in her face which the make-up box indeed did well to compensate, but when she stepped forth, in surprisingly quick time, such glances as one could catch of the face, hooded and veiled for more reasons than protection from the cold, were those of a woman both radiant and young. There was no apprehension in her mind. She was going to Vance Doane, and she had no fear of him. He had done his best both to kill her body and destroy her soul, but she was going back to him, with joy in her heart, hoping for a fresh conquest.

The one who had misgivings was Gladys. There were many things about this plan and its secrecy which she disliked, now that she had taken a little thought. She was not sure that it was right to send this woman to that man. However, since he was, in all truth, her husband, she could afford to leave that question to their own judgment. But Mrs. Smith was still a patient, and by no means a cured one. Supposing these men handled her roughly? This Italian, who had been working on the place, knew Mary well enough so that he might detect the fraud in spite of the veil and the evening's dusk. Supposing they hurt her in their rage. Who would be responsible?

"Hush, dearie," remonstrated Mrs. Smith. "Don't you suppose as I'm able to take care o' myself. No dago as ever lived could put any double cross on me; and as for Vance Doane, I'm just burning up to meet him."

But after she had watched the couple walk off along the snowy road, and had strained her eyes after them so long as the snow and a pale moon combined to render their figures visible, Gladys was still uneasy. It was all very well for Mrs. Smith to be so willing and even anxious, but that would be no excuse to offer the doctor and Mary to account for an absent patient next morning. Supposing the woman died of shock and exposure? The very thought frightened the girl. She would run after them and call them back. Snatching coat and hood she ran quickly down the snowy path to the gate, hoping to see them at the first turn of the road. When her hopes failed she ran on to the second turn. Scarcely had she passed it when she ran into a group just loading into a double carriage, with Mrs. Smith, fairly comfortable, in the rear seat.

"Oh, Mrs. Smith," she gasped, with what little breath remained. "You must come back. It won't do. I'm sure it won't do."

But Mrs. Smith was not able to reply. To avoid any possible outcries on the road, the men had supplemented her mufflings with swathings of their own which rendered her dumb.

And since this young lady was inclined to create a disturbance; and since the faint light of evening was yet strong enough to show very clearly that she could be nothing but an asset to any one in the business of kidnapping, their decision was quickly made. In a very brief time Gladys was trussed up on the back seat with Mrs. Smith.

Oh, Mr. Bissington Jones and also Mr. John Calhoun Langston, how true it is that "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley"!

XXXI

THE CHASE OF THE RED TOURING-CAR

THE abductors might well congratulate themselves on a neat job of work. They had made only one rather serious mistake—they had failed to secure the right person. It was her absence in fact that made things so easy for them and that allowed their work to remain undetected until the next morning. Mary reached home so late that she concluded that Gladys, being off duty, had gone early to bed, so she had no anxiety about her.

Lawyer Langston, coming early to his office next morning, found an Italian woman waiting at his door. His keen memory did not fail in its duty.

" You are the woman who lives on the old Willow Grove place, south of town, aren't you ? " He classified her at once. " You remember we brought you some stuff at Christmas ? "

Yes, the woman remembered. And was it not because she remembered, that she now at such great risk was here ? It was a most astounding tale she managed to communicate in her broken English. Her husband was the Italian hired for the extra odd jobs at The Castle. Last night he had brought home another man, and two ladies whom they had locked up in the only upstairs room that was in good repair. Her husband had stated that his part of the job was now complete and had gone off on the night train, leaving the other man in charge. In the early morning comes from the town a man with an automobile—red, so very red—and into the back seat the two men place the ladies, seat themselves in front, and off they go to some mysterious city in a northeast direction. But before they went she had seen the ladies in the morning light, a mutual recognition had occurred between her and the fairy angel, and the angel had managed to beg her to tell Mr. Langston.

To say that Johnny was amazed at such a revelation is light language. He was temporarily paralyzed. How had these villains stolen such a march on him? The other lady was Mary, he naturally supposed, and his anxiety for Gladys was greatly tempered by the thought that together they could come to no great harm. This was not touring weather, but the exceptional packing of the snow had made the roads so firm and level that the grey car had been kept in commission; only the previous day had its oil and fuel been renewed. He made a mad rush to The Castle, all speed regulations and records being absolutely shattered.

He found Mary there, to his great surprise, in terrible dismay at the absence of Gladys, which had just been discovered. Mrs. Smith had not been missed, but since the Italian woman's story called for two ladies a rapid review of the institution soon showed that she must be the second. It was some comfort to know that the girl had some one to bear her company.

They could think of but one explanation. The kidnappers, early at their work, had seized Gladys by mistake for Mary, and Mrs. Smith had attempted interference and so been included in the capture. There was but one thing to do, and that thing Johnny felt very sure that he could manage with his favourite grey car—overhaul the captors and rescue the captives.

We have known Mary as a woman of unusual character and strength, but, like all people of strength, she had her weakness, and it was her fairy sister Gladys. She was so hopelessly lost in woe that Johnny gave up all thought of consoling her. Turning he saw the Reverend Milton Stroud, and signalled for help.

"Please take Miss Mary into the office where she can be quiet, Mr. Stroud," he asked. "I have a few arrangements to make and then I intend to strike trail after those fellows and never give up until I run them down."

Milton Stroud helped Mary to the quiet of the office. Perhaps he was not so embarrassed as Johnny. He had been a minister almost ten years. He had comforted many distressed persons—both men and women. He had learned how to link loving sympathy with inspiration to courageous effort. And surely if ever his heart had inclined him to give comfort and consolation it urged him to it now. And, with equal certainty, this weeping girl could not in all the world have had sent to her a comforter more to her taste. They sat in the communal silence which needs no words for its interpretation until she was able to look up into his face with courage in her eyes.

"Do you think Mr. Langston will be able to overtake them?" she asked.

"Certainly," he assured her with a confidence based only on his wishes. "You may be quite at ease about Gladys. Mrs. Smith will be a protection, and I will myself go with Mr. Langston. I am well and sound now. I was to leave this week, you know. I will go with him and we will find her, have no fear."

" You are very good, Mr. Stroud. I am afraid to allow you to undertake a thing that may involve such hardships in this wintry weather. Yet I am so anxious about Gladys that I dare not say no."

" There is no danger to me, Mary " (never before had he so addressed her); " I will do anything for your sister and you. I will find her. And then, Mary, I am coming back to you for my reward."

Perhaps, at any other time, she might have been strong to resist, but now, in her weakness and her sense of great dependence, to have so strong a champion and protector, was sweetness unalloyed. Surely she could not say him nay. The hand remained in his encircling grasp. And as he drew her close and pressed a kiss upon her, it did not meet unwilling lips.

The door opened. They stepped hastily apart as Langston entered the room.

" It's a beautiful day," he announced, after a second's embarrassed silence. " Coming in here from the glare of the bright sun on the snow, I can scarcely see a thing."

" Indeed! " said Stroud, recovering himself. " I suppose your pupils are not as accommodating as your general disposition. Are you ready to start? "

" All ready. The run will be fine. I'd like a companion but I'm not going back to town after one."

" I am going with you," said Stroud, confidently.

" You! " exclaimed Johnny. " Can you stand it? "

" It will do me good. I have been trying my wings for some time past and this was to have been my last week here. Besides, it is my place to go."

A faint colour overspread the pale face of the nurse at these words, but she made no denial, and it was not until she stood out on the porch watching the car speed away with its gallant crew, that she fully realized just what Stroud's proclamation and her silence had announced.

"You don't object to them," said Johnny, nodding significantly toward the firearms which lay exposed in the rear of the car.

"I can fire off other things than pulpit oratory, if needed," the preacher assured him, briefly.

"They have a couple of hours' start of us," said Johnny, "but they won't be able to make our pace. There are four in their car, two of them ladies, and as they won't know they are followed they will probably travel with care. We will use just enough care to keep the car running on four wheels most of the time, or anyway two. You don't mind having your neck broken in a good cause, do you?"

"I can stand anything you can," replied Stroud. "Perhaps my neck is a little more precious now than it was earlier in the day."

"I saw and heard enough to know it," said Johnny. "But it's for her sister, you know. Until she is found there can be no happiness for Mary, consequently there can be no happiness for you, and I'm free to admit there can be no happiness for me."

"I don't know just how your happiness comes in, but I can guess," said Stroud. "You are rushing along at a tremendous pace without any hesitation. How do you know you are on the right road?"

"General principles." Johnny spoke sharply, his eyes glued to the road ahead. "Knowing Middane's headquarters, there is little doubt but he wants them in Chicago. They don't dare use the train, so they have chosen to travel by automobile. I think I am safe in following the main road for fifty or sixty miles, anyway. When we get near a big town I will begin to ask questions."

"How will you identify them?"

"They were foolish enough to choose a conspicuous, red car. Any one would be likely to notice a bright-red car with two men in front and two women behind. At this time of year, when travel is light, they are a shining mark."

Feeling sure that Lewistown would be avoided, Johnny shot through the little town at a speed that invited arrest, without any hesitation. They were in the outskirts of a large town before he made his first inquiry. A group of men repairing a culvert compelled slow speed. Yes, the men had particularly noticed just such a car with just such a party. It was at the beginning of work, so it must have been an hour and a quarter ago. They had asked about the road out of town, so were, no doubt, going on.

Johnny was disturbed to hear that they were still so far ahead, but when he picked up their trail beyond the town the time had dropped to an hour. That meant a start of not more than twenty-five miles. He ought to overhaul them in a couple of hours.

Alas for calculations dependent upon automobile traffic. Next instant came that wailing, despairing sound, truly the cry of an expiring spirit, for it is the wail of heated, compressed air as it rushes for its liberty through an opening in the encasing shoe. Johnny stopped. No use skidding into a ditch. He was out and working like a fury, in a minute, Stroud giving all the help he could, but when the damage was repaired they knew they had dropped twenty minutes; furthermore, the need of a new casing made slower travel and another stop for its exchange at the next large town. Then, at last, equipped with the new tire, they were out on the road again and ready for fast work.

Ready, but not able. An automobile travels so rapidly that it easily passes into new weather zones; travellers may not depend on unvarying weather through a long journey. Scarcely had they got into their high speed when a softening of the road told of danger. There had been a slow rain. The snow still lay underneath, but little puddles filled every depression, and instead of their uniformly firm track came long stretches of sludge spattering up in spite of mudguards; occasionally the car's action at some sudden twist in the road would tell of the danger of too rapid motion. There was no wisdom in wrecking the car; they were obliged to slacken speed and proceed cautiously. There was some consolation in knowing that the car ahead (they learned that it was still ahead) had suffered the same handicap.

Early in the afternoon they escaped from this treacherous road, and found themselves once more on a well-packed highway which allowed some speed. At a little town where they gobbled a hasty luncheon they learned that the red car had passed but a short time before. It could not be far ahead.

"Now for it," said Johnny, as he screwed in the cap of his oil reservoir. "We are still on the road to Chicago, and as they haven't stopped yet, it seems pretty sure they are making for the big city. We must catch 'em before dark or they will be swallowed up."

"But isn't there a big risk that we won't? Would it not be better to defy publicity, and just wire the police at the next big town to hold them?"

"Not to my notion. If we hadn't wanted to keep this from the police and the public we need never have started on the trip. Let's see it through now. Hold on to your teeth. We're going."

Further conversation was wisely suspended. The speedometer zigzagged around at all manner of impossible figures as the car rocked and bounded on its way, but it was unobserved by the driver; he needed both of his eager eyes for the road. It was well built up, level, and unobstructed, but at any moment a rock might shoot into view, or some foolish animal incline to the opinion that it possessed highway rights.

At times the level road would give place to hummocky, half-graded stretches, at which Johnny would slow down, relax the tension of his muscles, and increase that of his thoughts and language. But as soon as a fair stretch of road appeared the speed increased to its preferred furious rate. Johnny had acquired a deep respect for the red car and its driver by this time, and felt the necessity of using every inch of good road to best advantage.

A light snow began to fall as the afternoon rushed along and signs of the early evening of winter became manifest. It was not enough to impede progress, but it clouded the wind-shield and gave Stroud employment in clearing it. He was so engaged just as they topped a hill and came into full view of a long stretch of rolling country, with another big hill in the far distance.

"There they are," he cried. "It can't be much more than half a mile away; just at the top of that next hill. I can't tell the colour of the car but it fits the description all right. It is they. Be careful how you go down this hill, Langston. We don't want a breakdown now."

But not a sound came from Johnny. He was taking desperate chances and every nerve was intent on keeping the swaying, rocking complex of animate machinery to the lines of the middle road. Woe be to the animal that now crossed their path—woe be to the car should such crossing be attempted. Stroud's half-mile was a long one on a rough course, but it was covered in less than a minute. As they topped the hill they got a glimpse of the red car disappearing over the summit of the next. Another burst of speed and they would be within hailing distance. There must be no slackening, for every moment the storm increased, and every moment the gloom deepened. At the next rise they would be close enough to demand surrender.

But the next rise showed only a short stretch of flat road and another hill, and the next rise still another discouraging view. And so dismay came upon them, and the snow thickened until even their powerful electric headlights threw only a few subdued yellow beams which scarcely penetrated a car's length ahead, and the dark of evening joined its force to make the gloom close fast about them.

The red touring-car had won its race, for, whether pushing on to Chicago, or whatever it was doing, it was seen no more by its pursuers. When an eventful and exasperating night's journey brought them to the city, in the early morning hours, they had no profit to record for their trip, beyond two fleeting glances of a possibly red automobile, containing two males and two females.

XXXII

DOCTOR DAVID IS JUST IN TIME

HERE is a riddle: Black and white and red all over?

Yes, of course you know it. Every one does. Its familiarity is the one reason for producing it. You like to recognize old friends along the way, and experience a comfortable sense of superiority in your ready wit and cosmopolitan knowledge.

But here is another riddle: Why does the public so confidently accept as infallible the guidance of this same newspaper? You do it yourself, though perhaps scarcely recognizing the fact. A friend asks: "What do you think of So-and-So?" You reply, "I hardly know. I haven't looked at the morning paper yet," giving tacit acknowledgment of the source of most of your knowledge. "Is it going to rain?" asks your wife at the breakfast-table. Your answer is delayed while you turn to the front page and scan the weather forecast. You may readily catch yourself saying: "It seems from the morning's *Tribune* that," and many a time, when the authority of some statement has been questioned have you said, confidently, "I saw it in the paper, only yesterday."

Why do we so confidingly accept the reports and decisions of the newspapers?

Frankly admitting that we never were good at riddles, we offer only the suggestion that it may be because we do not realize how small a thing may turn a newspaper report for good or for evil.

The youngest and least important reporter on the *Tribune* received from the city editor a three-line slip which announced that a certain German professor, accompanied by his assistant, Doctor David Williams, had reached this country on a mission to expose the greatly exploited Hermann tuberculosis serum. His instructions, " Get a story on it," indicate the latitude allowed the young man by his distinguished chief and might well lead us to infer that the young man's judgment bore a high place in the editor's esteem; but our inference would be in error. The young man had no judgment in the matter, as his editor very well knew. He had a bright mind, superficially garnished by a high school course and one college year, and he had a great faculty for looking things up; but his judgment was still a thing of the future. His first impulse, on reading the slip, was to write something witty about Dutch professors, and, if possible, bring in some reference to beer and sauerkraut. Then came his second thought. A few weeks before, when still young enough to recognize his youth, he had been advised by a veteran that his newspaper education would be greatly advanced by reading a clever weekly, edited by a former *Tribune* man, the Latham Centre *Herald*. He had been much entertained by the editorial comments on a certain serum cure. Perhaps he could turn back to it and get a few pointers, since the Latham Centre *Herald* was one of the exchanges honoured with a file.

Possibly you recall some of the things said by the editor of the Latham Centre *Herald*. He said many more things in issues of that season, and the newspaper boy read all of them. When through he was highly, though unconsciously, tinctured with the views of Doctor Goodman as extracted and expressed by the editor of his home paper. Consequently he saw in the coming of the German Professor and Doctor David Williams an event of great importance in saving the country from a heartless fraud. Being still young enough to retain primitive principles he resolved that the *Tribune* should deal this fraud a most unexpected and obfuscating blow (the more the latter for being the former).

It happened that his stuff "caught on." The public was waiting for a new sensation. It saw it in the warning headlines, "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," "Everything Goes for Money," "Why Rob the Poor Lunger?" "Murder by a Medicine Man," and various other pieces of pleasing artistry with which the city editor, reaching a dull time, was pleased to embellish and adorn the work of his boy reporter.

Doctor David Williams, assistant to the great German professor, found himself famous before he had been in his home city overnight. He was lifted by a wave of sentiment which had been prepared for him by his friends, Doctor Goodman and Editor Holmes, with the clever assistance of the boy reporter. One newspaper having pulled the issue along to a point of popular favour, the other papers were all eager to get hold of the rope, and since David's superior was unfortunately hampered in directing his intense, German thoughts into the narrow, intricate mazes of English expression, David was compelled to be sole entertainer to a squad of reporters of varying intelligence and honesty, which seemed to have at least one of its members ready to bob up at any and every time and place.

It was so when David called at the Cook County Hospital; scarcely had the nice young interne, who was assigned to show him the work of their out-patient department and its methods of caring for Chicago's tuberculous poor, stepped into view, before there also appeared another nice young chap, who calmly announced that the *Herald* was greatly interested and would go with them.

The *Herald* man was a very pleasant young fellow, years past the cub stage, for the *Herald* editor had seen possibilities which had made it profitable to assign one of his best men to the story. When he asked a question there was nothing to indicate a catechism; he used a pleasant, conversational method which it would be gross impertinence to resent—or so his victims felt until, seeing the matter in cold type, they wondered how they ever came to talk so much.

"You are enjoying your trip to this country, Doctor Williams?" the reporter ventured to assume. "I suppose it is a great pleasure to you to get home?"

"It is, indeed," David assured him. "I have been away several years, but I have made a visit home almost every year."

"And your superior officer, the German professor? Isn't it rather a costly thing for him to come to this country just to expose a fakir? Pure altruism, eh?"

"Not exactly. He also is enjoying the trip. He had intended for many years to pay us a visit; the stimulus of this attempted fraud supplied the spark. You see he feels, in some measure, responsible. This serum, imperfect though it be, is really a child of his own brain. It originated in his laboratory. This man

Hermann was an assistant there, a common rascal but smart enough. He saw readily how taking a thing the professor had. He knew well enough that it was not a success, but seeing how it would catch the popular fancy, he stole the idea and started in to fool the public."

"Why didn't he stay in Germany, and fool the Germans? Why come to this country?"

David laughed and his laughter was shared by the interne; in fact the *Herald* man joined in himself.

"You know how ridiculous a question that is. Germany has plenty of quacks and victims, but—well, I remember when I was a boy and wanted bait, there was one particular place where I could get suckers in just a minute, at any time. Naturally I always went there."

"But Doctor Hermann has done a great deal of work that must be strictly charity. In New York he has a laboratory where he treats poor people free of charge, and he has done charity work at all of the hospitals that will admit him."

"You're a pretty good newspaper man," said David, keenly. "Do you suppose such work has any advertising value?"

"It may," admitted the *Herald* man.

"You know it has," asserted David. "Furthermore, you know that such advertising could not be bought with money."

"But if his method is a fake, isn't this public investigation at hospitals and so on a dangerous thing for him?"

"Not so bad as you might think. He issues most of his own statistics. The public does not discriminate between the cures reported from his own laboratory and those from public institutions. But if you will keep watch you will notice that all of the alleged cures are made at his private place and at one or two remote private hospitals. The very best report from the public hospitals is that several cases are no worse and an exceptional case seems really improved. There are cases of tuberculosis, all over this country, improving this very minute, with nothing at all but God's free air and the opportunity to drink it in."

"I suppose a person receiving free treatment would be inclined to give a favourable report as a matter of mere gratitude?"

"Yes, sir; also because they want to believe they are better. And there are ways of getting favourable reports entirely apart from either consideration. And for every charity patient who speaks a good word, this man has ten pay patients hand over the fee of two hundred dollars for his routine of ten injections."

"So you think it is straight graft?"

"The worst kind. Its secret methods and formulæ, which are no great secret, for we know what they amounted to before he stole them, are in themselves condemning. No real doctor maintains secrecy about anything which he knows to be of benefit to the human race. When a thing is ready to try out on the public it is ready to make plain to the profession."

"But if Hermann honestly believes he has discovered a mighty cure, what is there unfair about his charging a hundred or two hundred or any amount he can get for it, especially if he treats charity patients free?"

"There is no objection to his charging any amount he wishes. His charges are a matter between himself and his patient. Our objection is to his representing that he charges this fee because he has a mighty, infallible cure of which he alone possesses the secret, whereas he is really exploiting an unproven theory for sole purposes of gain. In doing this he is deluding and defrauding sick people, destroying their confidence in legitimate medicine, and restraining them from approved methods of cure which might be doing them real service. If his cure were a cure we would have nothing more to say."

"Well, he certainly has a fine bunch of testimonials."

"I hope it is not necessary for me to tell a newspaper man how testimonials are secured," remarked David, with a grin of sarcasm.

The newspaper man gave up.

"I just wanted to stir you up," he said. "I will undertake to get ten testimonials a minute, for ten hours in succession, for any fake that was ever put before the public, for a reasonable remuneration. This man Middane, who is the whole cheese for the Hermann cure in this state, has a fake called the Oxyjuvenator which presents a book chuck full of honest testimonials. Yet it is even a greater fake than the serum cure."

"I know something about Middane," said David. "He operates a place called New Hope, at my old home."

"He's a live wire, all right," testified the *Herald* man. "He is picking up money with a scoop scovel in this little village, in spite of what the newspapers tell about him. I suppose he has to divide his profits with Hermann, being only an agent, but I'll venture the guess that the 'laboratory' he runs here pays him some little. I don't know anything about his 'New

Hope.' I must look it up. Lately he has been here most of the time."

"I have never met the man," said David. "But from my correspondents I gather that he is a fit representative of the great Hermann."

"He may be at his place, right now. It is only a block or two away. Let's go look him up."

Their conversation had been carried on as they journeyed in an ambulance motor, and they were now in a thickly settled district of the city.

"No. I don't care to meet him at present. The doctor started out with me to show me a tenement right in your beautiful city—in the Italian quarter, I believe you said, Doctor?—from which eighteen cases of tuberculosis have been reported in a single year. We are getting near there now are we not, Doctor? This newspaper man should be able to get a story from it."

"We shall be there in a few minutes. It is nothing new to the *Herald* people, I guess, but it won't do any harm for our friend to come along."

"There's an ugly-looking crowd around the door," said the newspaper man, when they stopped. "Looks like some of our Camorrist friends from over the water."

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Reporter," chuckled the young doctor. "You're safe for once. They all know the sign on the ambulance car. I hereby cast over you the mantle of my protection. Come on up."

The crowd of idlers readily gave way before them.

"It's seven flights up," said the ambulance doctor. "And the worst is generally at the top. The best way is to go right up and work down a floor at a time."

Six wearisome flights of stairs they mounted in puffing endeavour, and here the young doctor, who was leading one flight in advance, met a great surprise. Three dark-browed sons of Italy, coming down from the top, made a violent rush at him; a terrible discourtesy and a deliberate insult to the hospital service. Had it not been for the immediate advent of Doctor David and the newspaper man a genuine need for an ambulance might have been recorded, but the unexpected reinforcements made short work of the attack and bundled the attackers downstairs in a heap.

The young doctor was greatly mortified.

"First time such a thing happened in my experience, I assure you," he gasped, still breathless. "I've had a few tumbles up with drunks, but never anything of this kind. Bet they took us for a vaccinating squad; always have some trouble vaccinating."

The newspaper man was not satisfied with such an explanation.

"Those fellows were full of real fight," he argued. "It's something more than vaccination. My news nose smells a story up here."

"I don't see anything out of the way here," said the ambulance doctor, looking around the passage and noticing the excited people in the doorways who seemed so uncertain whether to attack or encourage them.

"We will go on up to the top floor and look there," said David.

"People all gone. Too mucha seekness. Not anybody leeve up there," a kindly informant volunteered.

"We'll soon see," said David. "Come on up."

But the corridors were deserted and the doors locked.

"Looks as if they were right; everybody moved," said the doctor, after knocking on a door and hearing it give back the desolate ring of an empty room. "I have keys that will fit almost any of these places. I'll try this door if you like."

"Not for me. My curiosity doesn't go that far," said David.

"Mine does," declared the *Herald* man. "There's something wrong up here, I tell you. Those men were not excited over nothing. They'll be back here with a gang in a few minutes. Try your keys. If they won't work I have some of my own."

They worked. The door swung open and disclosed a bare, empty room with one single window opening on an air-shaft.

"I don't wonder that it's empty," said David.

The newspaper man was trying a side door.

"Where do you think this leads into?" he asked the young ambulance surgeon.

"The next apartment, by its looks. It's probably empty, too."

"We'll soon see. I'm going through. Put your ear down here. Hear that noise. It isn't a cry; it isn't a moan; it's just a mumble. I've heard its like before. Don't bother about keys, because there's a bolt holding this. It opens inside. Two of our shoulders and one with his boot will just about jab it in."

It did. The door would have fallen flat had it not been for David's restraining hold on the knob. And, had it done so, it undoubtedly would have struck two women—not Italian women—American women of superior dress and appearance, one of them a very pearl of beauty. They lay supine on the floor, their hands and feet bound, their mouths confined by curiously contrived gags which left them just able to mumble.

XXXIII

A FULL PARDON

THE young interne and Doctor David sprang to the relief of the helpless women. The newspaper man ran through to the front room of the apartment, where he opened the window and yelled to the driver below to send up the police. If these villainous men—his men of the Black Hand—were still in the building, or if they should return with reinforcements, he wanted them captured. When he returned the two women were on their feet, making futile little dabs at their disordered clothing.

"You ain't hurt a bit, are you, dearie?" the older was saying to the pretty one. "You see," she explained to the men, "we hadn't been trussed up hardly no time. We was loose till they all wanted to go away, then they pickled us. We ain't hurt a mite, but you just let me get hands on them dagoes." Her expression indicated that the dagoes could do themselves no greater kindness than to remain absent.

The younger woman had no fierceness in her look; instead there reigned a terrible distress, barely influenced by her grave effort at composure.

"Oh, I am so glad you came," she repeated again and again. "It has all been so terrible; and lying there, bound hand and foot and not knowing what to expect was awful, no matter how short the time. I am so glad you came."

"You must thank this gentleman," said Doctor

David, indicating the newspaper man. "You will feel better after the shock passes. We will take you home if you will tell us where to go."

"We want to go back home, Doctor. You are Doctor David Williams, I'm quite sure, and you will take us there."

Doctors are, in a measure, public characters, and are rather more accustomed than most people to being addressed familiarly by total strangers. But David was surprised, none the less.

"You are right. I am Doctor Williams. But who are you and how do you know me?" he asked.

"Your picture hangs in Doctor's room all the time —old Doctor Williams, you know, at The Castle of Cheer—I am Gladys Standlaws, one of the nurses, and this lady is a patient. We were carried away by these men, day before yesterday. You must let her tell you about it. I am faint."

She scarcely needed to explain her condition. The ordeal had affected her much more severely than her companion, of coarser fibre, who had undergone nothing she had not bargained for, and had experienced no dread of the outcome. Mrs. Smith, as a matter of fact, was feeling quite bright and very willing to talk. While the two doctors took charge of Gladys and helped her to safety, the newspaper man took charge of Mrs. Smith and helped himself to news. And that is why the afternoon newspapers had another sensation to offer, and why Johnny and Stroud, reading the same, did not start back through the snow to Latham Centre.

When Doctor David Williams had Gladys safely housed and bedded, in his own hotel, he sent to The Castle, at her request, a message partially true:

"Gladys is safe and well. Would like Mary to come. Am sending relief nurse."

The message was not the strict truth, for Gladys was prostrated from the shock, and much in need of the loving sympathy and help of her sister. She knew that Mary must also have suffered greatly, but assumed that she would be both able and anxious to come to her.

Mary's distress of mind had been terrible in the long hours of waiting, but she had borne up under it as might have been expected from a woman of great strength. But when an end came to her suspense, as the message was repeated to her by Bissington Jones, who answered the telephone, her control gave way.

"Oh, thank God," she cried. "Thank God. Thank God!" she sobbed almost hysterically.

"We all thank Him, daughter," sympathized the old doctor. "It's fine to thank Him now it's all over. It was finer that we could thank Him yes'day when we didn't know a thing 'bout it. We can't go to sister till that arternoon train. Put on yore wraps an' come out with Doc, an' git rid o' some o' yore thoughts."

She was glad to get away from the observation of the patients and nurses, sympathetic though it was. The old doctor walked her off toward his favourite spot—Goodman's Bluff, with its wonderful view of hill and valley.

"A day like this, snow everywheres and a wind at yore back, is fine to blow away heavy thoughts," said the doctor.

"I like it," she agreed. "But don't you think it may be too much for you?"

"Too much for me! Ye don't know what I c'n do, daughter. We'll go down the Stairsteps a piece an' git out o' the wind. Then the sun shinin' on us'll make it seem like spring. You don't know 'bout the Stairsteps. Right here it is. If ye know jest how, ye can go clear down into the valley an' save miles o' road. Trifle resky, but me an' Elsie Goodman done it wuss weather'n this, an' done it arter dark at that."

"Why, Doctor," she exclaimed. "What a terrible risk!"

"Yes, but it was for Davy, an' both of us loved Davy. An' we do yet, daughter. That's why I'm goin' to leave things with Doc Goodman, an' go with ye to Chicago this evenin'. I want to see Davy."

"How did you help him by going down this terrible bluff, Doctor?"

"Set right down on this stone that's been dried so nice by the sun. The wind's shut off now, ye see, an' it'll be right comf'ble. It was the time Dave had the diphthery an' we went down to git Doctor Goodman right quick. Set right down an' I'll tell ye 'bout it."

"You wanted antitoxin for his diphtheria," she guessed.

"Yes, I'd just woke up to somethin', daughter. Doc Goodman was down in the valley an' we'd no time to go round by the road." He told her the story in vivid detail, up to the time of David's recovery.

"How glad you must always feel that you were led while there was yet time," she said.

"Yes, daughter. I'd done my best, but God showed me 'at my best wasn't good enough. Sometimes He has to show us 'at our best is a awful pore thing, daughter."

"Yes, Doctor, but you don't mind the failure so much when there lies before you the opportunity to atone for it. The terrible thing is when the knowledge of your error comes too late, when there is no time left to make things right. That was the way with my father, Doctor. I told you about him when I explained about this money I am claiming. He wanted to use it to restore fourfold to the people who had given it; but he was denied the opportunity. Doctor, I'm going to ask you a question I've thought over many and many a time? Do you think it makes any difference to him now?"

"Difference in what way, daughter? D'ye mean is he any the less forgiven because he didn't have no time to try to get square with the world, ye understan' me."

"No, I couldn't think that, Doctor. Yet there must be a difference in some way. The price must be paid."

"Yes, the price must be paid. Have ye mebbe thought ye could pay it for him, daughter?"

"Perhaps not exactly that, Doctor. I can hardly analyze my ideas. Father was so joyful in planning to pay back to these poor people, that it was a terrible disappointment to me when I found that it could not be done. It was then that I resolved that though I had not the wealth to seek out each one and make restitution, I would do what lay in my power. I would consecrate my whole life to service to the poor and sick and destitute."

"And ye feel better for doing of it, daughter?"

"I don't know. It seems so inadequate. And I have so much inclination to leave it and do the things that other women do."

"Like gettin' married and things o' that kind?"

"Perhaps!" with the vision of yesterday in her mind she could hardly make a denial.

"And why not, daughter; why not?"

"It would be deserting my trust. It would be leaving my work. It would be giving up any attempt to pay the price."

"Daughter, ye have some things yet to learn. I got some good news for ye, gel. He paid the price Himself. 'His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.'"

"Yes, Doctor;" she was trying to be patient with the old man. "Of course I know about that. But still the penalty is there, you know."

"Sure I know it, gel. But it's for Him, the penalty is."

"But the restitution, Doctor. I must make restitution."

"You may do what comes to ye. But it ain't required that ye live in cloud and gloom; it ain't asked that yore innocent life be a sacrifice to things that's paid for a'ready, ye understan' me."

"Doctor, you would understand me better if you had ever felt the weight of evil deeds of the past—if you had ever done things that cried for vengeance or performed acts that demanded restitution. I can enter into the feelings of my dear father and the joy with which he planned to restore fourfold all that he had wrongfully exacted. But you have lived your quiet life untouched by real sin. You have never been out of harmony with God."

The old man did not reply. He was looking away off into the pleasant valley. Wondrous things lay before his vision, but the intent eyes saw none of them. He was casting his gaze inward, back into the years of long ago, back to the time when the locks now white had shone with the glint and colour of youthful vigour, back to the days when his dealings with his God had been those of the man who believes in a Creator only because there must be some explanation of this virile life that animates his form; back to the days of turbulence and passion and lust and hate and murder and penalty and pardon. Back went his thoughts as they had not travelled in many years.

"Daughter!" The voice that broke the stillness caused Mary to look into the doctor's face with a passion of interest, so full was it of sympathy and pain.

"Daughter, I'm goin' to tell ye somethin' nobody else knows since a few years gone when I laid Aunt Mercy away—not even Davy knows. The man ye sit with in this pleasant sunshine this mornin' sat on jest such a mornin' some fifty year ago, lookin' out on some such a peaceful scene, miles an' miles away f'm here. But a smokin' gun lay at his hand, daughter, an' down there in the bushes, away below, was everything that makes another strong, active man 'ceptin' the soul this murderer had released. Dead, daughter, dead! Oh, God in Heaven, he could never come back! Nothin' I could do would bring him back! Takin' my own life, as I wanted to now that my lust of passion was gone, wouldn't bring him back! Sayin' as he had deserved it wouldn't bring him back! Thinkin' it was him or me wouldn't bring him back. He was gone, an' that wonderful, vig'rous frame was lyin' there to stiffen an' grow cold an' useless with its work undone an' its poss'bilities forever cut off. Dead!

"An' they put the murderer in jail, daughter, where he belonged. An' there he had many a hour to think that the minute of passion had killed the body o' one man' an' the souls of two, an' to suppose that there'd never be no more sunlight, never be no more flowers, no more singing birds, no more hot suns o' summer, no more keen winds o' fall, no more pure white snow, no more seedtime an' harvest an' holiday rejoicin', no more comfortin' the sick or restin' the weary. For the man was dead!

"An' then people whose hearts was softer 'n their hands gets together an' tells the Governor some o' the things 'at they knowed right well wasn't no real excuse. But there come a day when one of 'em comes to me in the prison an' says: 'Doc, yo're a free man. The Governor's sent ye a pardon!'

"Daughter, I ain't a-goin' to try to tell ye all I thought an' all I said, but them words went a-ringin' in my ears for days an' weeks an' months, an' I can hear 'em yet: 'The Governor's sent ye a pardon.'

"So I went back to what I'd ben doin'—here a little doctorin', an' there a little o' one thing an' another, ye understan' me. An' evybuddy treated me white an' I done what I could for the man's folks, but, arter all, the birds wasn't singin' yet, an' the smell of the new-turned earth didn't find me, an' the flowers hadn't the colour of old, an' all the time the thought went along of me: 'The man's dead. No Governor's pardon can't bring him to life.'

"An' it went on for a many months an' into the years, an' then come the time when the old circuit rider bruk his laig an' I fixed him the best I knew so he got along jes' tollable, an' when he went he says, 'Doc, I ain't got no money but such as I have give I unto thee. This little book is the Way of Life.'

"Daughter, d'ye know I wouldn't read it for weeks, an' the Lord had to lay me on my back with a long spell o' sickness. But it come at last. I learned what was in it. It didn't have only a pardon for me, daughter, it had a whole lot more'n that. The Governor, he'd pardoned me, but it left me all crippled an' not able to take up life where I'd left it because the man could never come back. Then at last come the pardon f'm the only one who has any real pardons to give an' I was pardoned, redeemed, an' made over new. I couldn't soar on the old wings, daughter, but God give me new wings of faith that didn't have no scar on 'em nor no earthly marring. Then He says to me, ' Soar on these wings. Don't try to fly fer yore pore mis'able self, but fly for me. Rise now to the high places 'at ye've never dared s' much as lift yore eyes up to.'

" Daughter, with a redemption so powerful, a pardon so free, an' a Redeemer so great, it's limitin' His love to say ye got to live a life of restitution for a man dead an' gone. Don't ye never think 'at he's any less happy up there in the great beyond. Don't think 'at he's any less forgiven. Pay his debts if ye git the money—all of 'em, every one of 'em—but don't try to carry his burdens, for long ago he laid them on his Lord.

" Does the old man know how 'tis, daughter? Can he understan', d'ye think? Is he able to tell ye what to do? Ah, gel, it's them that's sinned that knows what mercy means. It's them that's been forgiven much that learns to love much."

XXXIV

MISS JOLLEY WANTS HER MONEY BACK

MARY and the old doctor, hurrying to Chicago on the overland express, might well feel that they were on their way to a reunion. Events had strangely coincided to gather many of their intimate group in Chicago at this time, and it might be said that Doctor Middane was the key to it all. In the first place, in order to be near his "laboratory," he had moved himself to Chicago. Then his objectionable and false representations had brought Doctor David Williams with his German professor to Chicago; his kidnapping outrage had brought Mrs. Smith and Gladys; the resulting pursuit had brought Mr. Stroud and Johnny; and the relief of Gladys was bringing Mary and the doctor. One other humble friend was already in the city. This was Miss Jolley, who had been dismissed from The Castle as "improved" a short time before.

Miss Jolley knew quite well that she was not cured. Doctor Goodman and his colleagues had taken great pains to impress upon her that although she was allowed to leave The Castle it was merely as one in whom the disease was "arrested." It was her business to see that it did not escape from arrest. Knowing the situation Miss Jolley took her place in the humble household of which she formed a cheery part with great circumspection.

Chicago is not generally classified as a health resort but no large city offers better opportunities for the continued improvement and final recovery of patients of Miss Jolley's class who make an honest effort. This is because of its splendid dispensary system, available to the poorest citizen, which not only offers care and help to the desperate case, but continues its supervision when the patient has again taken up life's journey. Of this help Miss Jolley availed herself with her customary cheerful independence.

One of the things impressed upon the little lady was the necessity for a great amount of rest and the continuation of open-air sleeping. This might well have seemed an impossibility to the uninitiated, for the Chicago residence of Miss Jolley was one of a row of dingy brick buildings constructed on the "straight front" principle and equally straight in the back. The one single way in which the Jolley house differed from its partners was in the possession of a very slender ledge which projected above the front of the store—said store being the medium through which the Jolley family was provided with a living by the brother who was its head. Using this slender ledge for a base the dispensary people rigged up for Miss Jolley creditable outdoor sleeping quarters. It was agreed that the rear of the house would have been far preferable but unfortunately the Jolleys were unable to dispute the undoubted right of another family to the rear premises.

The new arrangement was not entirely agreeable to Miss Jolley though she accepted it with great merriment. Her sleeping out at the sanatorium had been provided for by a clever arrangement which allowed her bed preparations all to be made in a warm room and she met the frosty air only when snugly bedded in a way which bade defiance to cold. To make somewhat similar provision here required the purchase of a special couch and certain changes in the construction of her windows, all of which demanded more money than she possessed. Her bed was now left out in the cold the whole long winter day. The night air was both brisk and keen and when the wind blew it seemed that she dwelt in a house of cards ready to tumble at the very next blast. Nevertheless Miss Jolley persevered in doing all the things that were prescribed for her to do, for she was a loyal little soul, and having been brought thus far on the road to health admitted no possibility of a setback.

It was while lying in her open quarters in the early morning that her brother threw the morning paper in to her. This was his custom, for he insisted that since she was to take much rest in the fresh air she should stay late in bed each morning. So it came that Miss Jolley read the newspaper story of the kidnapping and thus became acquainted with the important event.

It was indeed spicy news. The writer had taken full advantage of Mrs. Smith's gratitude and volubility. She had known a great many things, the reporter had known a great many things; what he had not known he had guessed, and as a joint result the newspaper presented for public consideration several spicy problems. It brought back the old story of the Doane estate—of the eccentric will—of the missing heiress. It revealed the fact that Henry Vancil Doane and the quack Middane were one and the same. It congratulated Doane that he no longer was in demand for the little trouble that caused him to change his name. It wondered if the millions of dollars would reconcile the lady to the man who had to go with it. It volunteered an opinion that she did not have to take him, and furthermore that she could not, for the reason that his relations with Mrs. Smith were such that another nuptial knot would serve only to tie him up in difficulties. It related a good deal of his private history.

It gave half a column to the Oxyjuvenator also. It told how it was formerly manufactured in Chicago and sold extensively and how its manufacture, and to some extent, its sale had been illegally conducted by Middane from his place of "New Hope" since the control of the estate and business had passed from his hands at his father's death. It then told about the exposure by the State Board of Health which had shown the true value of the apparatus, all of which was of tremendous interest to Miss Jolley, for she herself had been a victim.

The newspaper did not slight the episode of the chase by Johnny Langston, and by no means did it omit mention of the Reverend Milton Stroud, any reference to whose name was always a good item in the city in which he was so popular. Mrs. Smith had evidently made some very definite statements to the reporter, for he announced boldly that Mr. Langston was engaged to the kidnapped girl, and just as boldly that the activity of Mr. Stroud was because of a similar relation with the sister of the young lady, the head nurse of the institution at which he had been seeking his health.

Miss Jolley did not know that these announcements were premature, and read them with great pleasure. Her particular interest, however, was in another matter. She lost no time in appearing at the breakfast table.

"That man Doane's the doctor I saw once when I was at The Castle, I guarantee," she assured her brother. "The paper says his place is only about five blocks from here."

"I know the place," replied her brother. "What about it?"

"I'm going to see him. That's what about it. I'll go see him this very morning."

"What's the hurry? Why do you want to see him?"

"I want thirty dollars to fix my bed and I want it quick. Don't you remember I bought one o' them Oxyjuvenator things before I went to The Castle?"

"Yes. It didn't do you any good, either. But that's no sign you'll get your money back."

"Well, now, I guarantee I will. The paper says the thing never was worth as much as a black cat's shadow. I'm going to see that man an' get back my money an' tell him just what I think. Honest to goodness, I am."

She was fortunate in her choice of time, for she met the celebrated doctor just as he descended the steps of his building and recognized him without difficulty.

"Stop a minute, Doctor," she directed. "Perhaps you remember me."

"I fear that I haven't the pleasure," said the wily doctor, attempting to pass. "There's a clerk in the office will see you. I must hurry on."

"Not this time, I guarantee," insisted the little lady. "The last time we met was at Latham Centre. Do you remember?"

"You were not a patient, surely," said the doctor. "You look perfectly well."

"I am pretty well. I got well at The Castle of

Cheer. Before that you undertook to make me well with a piece of apparatus that you sold me for thirty dollars."

"It probably did more for you than you credit," said the doctor. "You bought it; you used it; you are now well. Doesn't it seem logical?"

"No, because I got worse steady as long as I depended on it. But I never knew, till I read it in the paper this morning, that it was nothing but a piece of gas-pipe and a little charcoal. That's just a plain swindle."

"My dear lady, you must not believe all that you read in the papers."

"I told you once before not to 'dear lady' me. I'm little, but there's some things I won't stand. I want my money back now."

"If you think you have a claim go in and see my clerk. I must be going."

"I'll go with you while we talk it over," said Miss Jolley. "I prefer to do my business direct."

"I've no time for you." Doctor Middane was losing his polish. "Don't be foolish."

"I'm not—now. I was when I swallowed your hook. I'm not even foolish enough to think that you have any idea of being square. I'm mad clear through now, and I tell you that you're just a common cheat."

"Sorry to have your bad opinion," he sneered.

"You'll be more than sorry some day," Miss Jolley assured him. "Just now you're doing all the no-account, low-down tricks that your miserable soul thinks of. But your time's coming, young man. There'll be an end to you and your tricks. And I guarantee you won't have stayed over night in the place you're headed for before you'll be sorrier than you ever expected to be. Honest, you will!"

"If it's as bad as that you ought to have pity on me," said he.

"You're right," Miss Jolley agreed. "I'll pray for you."

XXXV

MRS. SMITH PRESCRIBES FOR HERSELF

GREAT as was the interest of Miss Jolley in the newspapers of that issue, it was far surpassed by that of Doctor Middane. There were a number of points of discussion very vital to the doctor. He did not greatly fear any menace to his personal safety no matter what they might say. No one could definitely connect him with the abduction. His Italian agents had promptly disappeared, and it would require a very smart person to locate them. But he was greatly chagrined and disappointed to find how his plans had miscarried. The news of the substitution of Mrs. Smith for Mary came to him with an unpleasant shock. He had hoped the woman long since dead of her disease; he knew that she could stand more or less in the way of his amorous and financial schemes, and he was distinctly disappointed that she should have come to life. Doctor Middane was still anxious to get Mary, but he was far more anxious to get the fortune.

A few million dollars is not accounted a great fortune in Chicago, where men still make that much between the rising and the setting of the sun. But it presented a very dazzling radiance to Doctor Middane, whose ways of making money, though easy, had not been exactly like finding it.

He had made some money on his outfits: namely and to-wit, about twenty-nine dollars and seventy-five cents on each outfit retailing at thirty dollars, and there had been a goodly number of the credulous who had contributed to his wealth without a struggle. It must be admitted, however, that not all of his "prospects" had been as confiding as seemed desirable. Many had ignored the first offer, and often it had been necessary to send five or six letters, each of them entailing postage expense, and perhaps, finally, to reduce the price of the article so low as to leave little more than two thousand per cent. profit.

There had been much the same disappointments in his New Hope sanatorium. It was not all profit, by any means. He was careful to charge two hundred dollars for injecting his serum, and to add to that regular prices for board and room of such patients as stayed at his institution. But, once in a while there were provoking people who led him to think them able to pay and then robbed him of his revenue. There was that Italian count for instance—but it is no good enumerating his troubles; the fact remained that this fortune presented as bright an outlook as anything in his range of vision, and he intended to do his best to make sure of it.

Since he was not yet ready to drop his medical practices, the doctor was not at all pleased by the newspaper comments upon his various enterprises, although it may also be said that he was not so very greatly disturbed thereby. Very little appeared of a complimentary nature. Remarks about "Commercializing the art of healing" and "Turning a work of mercy to financial advantage" were quite commonly applied to his methods. The *Herald* and the *Tribune* were especially virulent. In one issue would be quoted some expert who "admitted that anything giving promise of hope in the attack against tuberculosis was worthy of consideration, but could hardly see wherein the Hermann treatment offered any hope or gain to anyone except Hermann himself and his agent Middane." Next issue would come another man, whose reputation was so good that the very mention of his name increased his words a thousandfold in importance, and say: " There has been time and opportunity in plentiful measure extended to Doctor Hermann and his agent, Middane, to demonstrate the therapeutic value of this treatment, but there has been no demonstration of any value. On the other hand, we have reports of experimental cases in which great detriment appears to have been suffered."

Oh, it was poor stuff for advertising. Yet it did not utterly discourage Middane, for long experience had taught him that the public has a short memory, and he believed that he knew where to buy newspaper space when his time came.

And he believed his time would come. Mary was right here in the city of Chicago now. He believed in himself enough to think that he could devise ways of winning or trapping her into helping him to that fortune, and then if he wanted any more money, with that capital back of him, he knew how to make it. Let no foolish person think for one moment that Doctor Middane was through.

It was well for Mary Standlaws that she had no knowledge of his thoughts and schemes, to add to her perplexities. She had come to Chicago, with the doctor, with the primary purpose of helping Gladys over her shock. Langston and Langston had that day given her official information that the Doane fortune was at her disposal, and unless some meddlesome person secured legal injunction or otherwise restrained her, there was nothing to prevent her entrance upon the work of carrying out her father's wishes. She did not, therefore, expect to return to Latham Centre. She would need a keen adviser in the great work she expected to undertake, for she had absolutely no knowledge where or how to begin. Her first task, therefore, with Johnny Langston's aid, would be to secure such an adviser and manager. But the appalling publicity of her affairs and the immediate personal notoriety which she was compelled to face, hindered her. It became absolutely necessary that she remain in close confinement, so disagreeable was the observation and comment to which she was subject, though most of it was intended to be kindly sympathetic. Perhaps it was fortunate that an immediate and active demand for her services existed.

Gladys had suffered little and quickly rallied, but Mrs. Smith was very ill. Each had suffered the same exposure and the nerve strain had been far greater upon Gladys, but it found in her an active, virile body, well able to bring reserves of strength to rally against shock. Alas, for poor Mrs. Smith! She had been buoyed by excitement rather than strength, and excitement is a poor prop to withstand exposure. The lung that had been put to rest by the nitrogen gas was in poor condition to stand excessive strain and the other lung found its labours overwhelming. She was very ill, indeed, with an acute pneumonia.

The poor woman was well cared for, receiving the medical attention of Doctor David Williams and his most eminent associate, the German professor, but she gave a great sigh of relief when Mary appeared.

"You're the one I am looking for," she gasped, in painful whispers, as she eagerly clasped Mary's hand in both of her own. "I don't know that you can make me well, but you can help me. There's things I can ask you to do as these other people wouldn't understand."

"We will do whatever you wish and soon help you out of your distress," Mary assured her.

"Yes, but there's two ways out of distress," she managed to say, with some of her old-time vivacity. "I want you to use something I've got in my bag. It won't interfere with nothing the doctors are doing and it has helped me before."

"Anything that doesn't interfere with the doctor's orders," Mary agreed.

"Well, you'll find this in the bottom of the little bag. I most always carry it with me when I go anywhere, so I put it in the bag—your bag—that I packed just before I came away. You'd better bring the bag to me."

Mary did as directed and as the patient was too weak to raise herself in bed she opened the clasps and held the bag open for inspection. A little rummaging with her long fingers and Mrs. Smith brought from the bottom a peculiar metal contrivance, having attached to it two long cords, each terminating in a metal disk.

"Get a bucket of water now, please," directed Mrs. Smith.

Wondering, the nurse obeyed.

"You put the cylinder in the water now, then you connect one of them disks with my ankle and one with my wrist," the patient gave further direction.

"But what is it all for?" Mary ventured to inquire.

"It's to drive out the fever," replied the believer. "This is the most remarkable thing in the world, but I know as you nurses and doctors and scientific folks won't never believe in it; it's too much of a blow at your business. I bought it when I first took sick and I depended on it altogether till I come to The Castle. It cures all diseases so you can't make no mistake, and it sure won't interfere with none of the medicine."

Mary took the marvellous cylinder in her hands and turned it over and over as if to peer into its miraculous healing properties. Staring up at her she saw engraved on its side, "The Oxyjuvenator, Chicago, Ill." It was her very first occasion of meeting with the instrument that had made the Doane fortune!

She looked again at the patient, a world of protest in her eyes. Mrs. Smith could not speak, for she held in her lips the thermometer Mary had placed there a moment before, but she shook her head most emphatically.

The nurse took the thermometer from her mouth and glanced at the record. It was 106°.

"It can do no harm," cried the patient.

And the nurse knew that she was right. Its harm was done forever. This was no time for argument; a dying woman was not one with whom to quibble.

She dropped the cylinder into the bowl of water and busied herself attaching the worthless connections as directed, while her mind and heart throbbed with the impulse to atone for this monstrous iniquity upon which the fortunes of her family had been reared.

XXXVI

"TELL MARY TO GIVE HIM A CHANCE"

AND the Reverend Milton Stroud! Did not he also read the Chicago newspapers and receive their full and free information? How did he enjoy being featured as a hero of the chase? How did he like the newspaper's announcement that he was engaged to the sister of the lady of the chase, which sister was the head nurse of the institution where he had been sojourning? Was it a pleasant thing for him that his congregation should receive this announcement in this playful manner?

It was not. He resented every published reference. He was greatly incensed at the unauthorized report of his engagement, and when a friend telephoned an inquiry, he denied it outright. Be not quick to condemn him. It was a hard situation for Milton Stroud. An ordinary man may take a wife unto himself. But a minister brings one to his congregation, and it expects as much from her as from himself. It does not favour sensational matches. It prefers a quiet, well-ordered campaign, won finally by a home product.

Milton Stroud did not look at the situation on its humorous side, as Johnny Langston viewed it. A minister is always handicapped in his efforts at being just a man. How should it be otherwise? He makes an early choice, and as a mere youth goes forth a minister. He is at this time a young man whose whole experience of life is that of boy rather than man; and from his ordination on he is treated not as a man but as a minister—a priest. People often think things about the minister but seldom do they speak them to his face. Not every one defers to him, but opposition is always passive rather than active. There is a great deal of pedestal business and likewise a great deal of pelting at the image on the pedestal; but it is quite different from the give and take of an ordinary man's life. The whole community is in a conspiracy to keep the minister from seeing things as do other men, and the fact that, in spite of this, so many of them are human beings is one of the highest possible tributes to their perspicacity.

So the minister resented hotly the published references to this most sacred matter, though he had expected to announce it himself, widely and joyfully, as soon as a few more definite words had been spoken. And he resented still more the sly allusions of acquaintances, the telephone inquiries which were made with such great attempts at incognito, and the notes (mostly unsigned) which came in abundance.

" I am sure that our dear pastor is not to be tempted by the glittering possibility of a fortune, though it reach into the millions," said one note. " A good conscience, a name free from evil report, a helpmeet who really understands church matters—how sweet it is to really understand—is far better than riches from unpleasant sources."

Little wonder that he snappishly told some telephone inquirers that it was none of their business, and others that the report was a newspaper fiction. And little harm would have resulted had not some of these same sympathetic inquirers—several of them, in fact—managed to relay the information to Mary, in spite of her seclusion. She was already repentant of her moment's yielding. She felt that she had no right to yield. Her business for the next few months lay in the distribution of as much of the Doane fortune as she could honestly restore to its contributors. After that she would again be a poor woman, her work of atoning for her father's error still incomplete. So she wrote Mr. Stroud a little note to say how sorry she was that he had been annoyed by foolish reports and how glad that he had squelched them so completely. And she resolved to forget.

Mary might have known Milton Stroud well enough to guess the effect of such a communication. He had no thought of giving her up. His vexation had not been with her, but with the busybodies who attempted to dictate his private affairs. More than ever was he convinced that she was the woman for his wife. He had an engagement at the hotel which helpfully served him. He was to be examined by Doctor David Williams and the eminent German scientist as to his physical condition. He resolved that when these men of medicine had given their opinion, and that opinion showed him sound in body, he would go to a still higher authority and learn his standing on less material but more important points.

He presented himself to the examining physicians with immense concern. It was of tremendous importance that he should again be able to count himself a sound man. He heard their verdict with as deep emotion as any prisoner at the bar of justice.

"He is an example most profitable," said the professor, speaking to David in German, which Stroud could just understand. "He is a lesson well demonstrated. An incipient case, early to the sanatorium, well handled, a stay of sufficient length to bring real results, and here he is apparently cured. He's as sound as you are."

The doctors did not stay. They were very anxious about the case of Mrs. Smith, who lay in a room upstairs, fighting for existence. They left Stroud to voice his joy to the old doctor.

"I'm as glad as you," said the old man. "Plumb cured, ain't ye? It shorely makes ye feel like ye can do anything on earth. But don't ye do it, ye understan' me."

"I intend to be careful, Doctor. I must keep my health for my work. You remember the prescription you said I should get filled when I was well."

"I remember it, son. It's just as good a perskiption now as when I give it, ye understan' me. Think ye know where ye can go to git it filled?"

"I know where I'd like to go."

"Anybody any objection to offer?"

"No one of great importance, though a few of my people have seemed a little antagonistic."

"Mebbe they think they've a right."

"They think so, possibly."

"Kind o' mutual affair. You tell 'em who they orter marry, an' they tell who you orter."

Stroud laughed feebly. "I hadn't thought of it that way, but I suppose that's a good way to put it."

"How much 'tention do they pay to what you say 'bout them?"

"None at all," said the young minister, with much emphasis.

"How much you goin' to pay to what they say?"

Stroud's face lighted and his jaw set firmly.

"None at all," he said, with greater emphasis.

The old doctor patted him on the back with grave sympathy and approval.

"Thought ye'd see it that way, son. Thought ye would. It's a place where no outside buddy can step in, ye understan' me. It's for nobody but you—an' her—an' eternity!"

The minister stood for a moment in silence.

"Can I see Miss Mary for a few minutes, do you think?"

"As far as me bein' the doctor an' her bein' the nurse you can, perfessionally speakin', that is; but as far as her bein' the gel an' you bein' the man, I dunno. Guess ye'd better send up word to fin' out."

But the heart affairs of Milton Stroud were to get no consideration that evening. He was called into conference for higher matters. The note brought back by the messenger simply said that Mary was so very glad Mr. Stroud was in the hotel and would he please come up to see Mrs. Smith.

A hotel is a tragic place for sickness and death. While housing hundreds it is a home for none. The crowd which fills its cubicles and throngs its corridors divides into units, each concerned with individual affairs. The signs of sickness, the sounds of distress, even the evidence of attendance must all be concealed from the other guests, lest their peace or comfort be disturbed. Stroud rode to the twelfth floor in an elevator filled with people talking the light topics of the day. A young man who stepped off with him went jingling his keys and whistling along the corridor. A woman trilled the lines of music that still lingered in her memory, as she stepped into her room. Then he turned a knob and was in the presence of the angel of death.

The doctors were gone. There was nothing more that they could do. The woman was dying. She was no great loss to the world. There were few to mourn her departure. She was going to swell the throng of better people, and some worse people, who had left life's struggle early in the fight. A woman hardly fit for living and certainly unfit for dying—but going just as absolutely as one who goes prepared. Going—and so unready! Going—and from a disease preventable! Going—and adding one more to a vast army of citizens (really useful and desirable citizens) who constantly go along this great white way.

At the side of the bed stood a man whom Stroud did not recognize. It was Vance Doane, summoned at Mrs. Smith's request, to gratify her last moments.

He was not the important Doctor Middane. His smooth loquacity was in abeyance, his urbanity had disappeared, his self-confidence had vanished away. No doubt he would later find the death of this woman a great relief. But now he stood limp and abashed in the presence of the awful mystery that dignifies the dying, and realized his insignificance.

And she, this woman whom he had abused and deserted, did she use the breath remaining in her fevered body to upbraid him for his faithlessness and brutality?

"I wanted to see you just once more, Vance," were her words, as both her wasted hands twined themselves around his limp fingers. "I had to see you before I passed out. I've been living with Mary and the preacher and these people that's good, an' I want you to begin training with their crowd, because I know it pays. I want you to, Vance."

And although Mr. Stroud had come in order that he might minister to her dying needs, the words she strained to say to him were not for herself.

"Vance ain't so bad, Mister Stroud," she gasped. "Give him a chance. Tell Mary to give him a chance. He ain't so bad!"

And there was a great stillness.

XXXVII

HENRY VANCIL DOANE WOULD SOAR AGAIN

MISS JOLLEY was at some little inconvenience in attending the church of her adoption, but nothing could have induced her to slight the service of the next Sunday evening. The hour's ride on the elevated and a few traffic difficulties combined to make her and her brother a little late, but they found they were not without company, for the vestibule was well filled with late comers waiting admission.

The cards on the vestibule walls announced " A reverent silence is requested," but Miss Jolley nudged her brother and whispered to him in some excitement.

" Do you see that man standing near the balcony stairs. It's that doctor—Doane or Middane—or whatever his name is—the man who got my thirty dollars. I wonder to see him. What I said to him did him good, I guarantee."

Possibly she was mistaken. If any softening influence had sent Doctor Middane to church it was more likely the death of the woman whom he had acknowledged as his wife. Perhaps he thought it fitting that after Milton Stroud had performed the last solemn rites for the wife, the husband should at least come to hear him preach. Miss Jolley knew nothing of this, but, filled with interest in the man, she followed him closely when the ushers opened the doors, and found some satisfaction in being seated in an end seat immediately behind him, where she could watch him unobserved.

There was another party in the church, in which Miss Jolley would have felt a much greater interest, for it consisted of the old doctor, Johnny Langston, and Miss Mary. She saw nothing of them, however, for the church was large and packed full to greet the popular pastor on his return, in full health, to his labours.

The soloist of the evening was just beginning as Miss Jolley settled in her seat.

" I walked through the woodland meadows
Where sweet the thrushes sing,
And I found on a bed of mosses
A bird with a broken wing.
I healed its wound, and each morning
It sang its old, sweet strain:
But the bird with a broken pinion
Never soared so high again."

" Where have I heard that? " she thought, and her memory flashed back to the scene of the " Sunday sing " at The Castle.

" It's fine," she said to herself. " But Miss Mary sang it just as well." Then, as the singer reached the line, " But the life that sin had stricken never soared so high again," she recalled the pathos which Mary had put into that line.

" I know why she took it so hard," she mused. " She was thinking of her pa. Now the newspapers have told the story I can see what she had on her mind. Wonder what the sinner in front of me thinks about it? "

The preacher's text this evening was very appropriate. It was found in Jeremiah, Chapter 17, Verse 14. "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved."

One of the things contributing to the popularity of the Reverend Milton Stroud was his entire innocence of pulpit tricks. He always remembered that he stood in a large church before many hundreds of people who had taken much trouble to come to worship, and were entitled, every one, to hear all that he had to say, and that these things that he had to say must be such as every one could understand. There was no aggravating drop of the voice at moments of crisis, there was no appeal to a special few, there was no sneering at the poor, there was no railing at the rich. When Milton Stroud stood in his pulpit he spoke as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and every man was a man and no man was more than a man.

The minister was in the middle of his story before Miss Jolley realized that he was actually telling of his own sanatorium experiences, for he named no places and made no specific references. Then indeed she listened more intently than ever, listened and heard him saying: "And so this wonderful thing came true—the man was healed. He who dreaded so to own his defect, his lapse from a sound body, who feared that the very act of acknowledgment stamped him as a marked man, a doomed man, now heard the doctors speak of him as sound. More than that, he heard a theory that almost all persons who are free from this disease are so because at some time in their lives they have met and conquered it. He was healed. He could run and not be weary, he could walk and not faint. 'Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed.' Do we believe it? Let us follow then to the next section, 'Save me, and I shall be saved.' " He drew a masterly analogy between the ravages of disease in the body and sin in the soul before he returned again to his text.

" 'Save me, and I shall be saved.' Is this cry to be in vain? Is it not equally potent with 'Heal me and I shall be healed'? Is there no restoration to sound health of soul, or must the sinner always bear those lesions, always flutter feebly with that broken pinion? The body has yielded to disease or there would be no recovery, but it is stronger for the fight it has made. The soul has yielded to sin or there would be no salvation. May it not also be stronger? Must it be true that the life that sin has stricken never soars so high again? Away with such analogy. Shake it from you. Face the situation boldly. You agonize over some event in your past—you think it has ruined your life. If I could only go back and omit that, you say. If it could only be blotted out. In this audience, this very night, is more than one who is agonizing in this way. Let us be very clear about it. Are you disturbed about the displeasure of your Lord or the censure of your fellow-men? You say it has ruined your life, and I say your life is full of hope as ever, if you will let it be. You say it never can be blotted out, and I say that He has blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions. Enough of vain regret. Turn back to the page—lay it bare. Look at it in all its repulsive gloom. Consider it well. Then dare to say that it may not be touched with the finger of God and made an ennobling influence; that it may not be used by Him as a warning mark—a guiding signal to save you from error. But more than its negative virtue. Dare to say that it may not inspire you to deeds for which you never would muster courage, but for its lash; that it may not goad you to climb to higher places than your coward soul would contemplate, save for its spur. Who are they who love much but those to whom much has been forgiven? Who bears the burden of apostleship better than the chief of sinners? Away with brooding over past mistakes. Let remorse and regret bring you to a godly repentance, and have done with it forever. It is the Lord who saves, and His saving is complete as His healing. Who will cry with me this night: 'Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel'?"

Milton Stroud's church was a business church; his sermons were business sermons; it was no unusual thing for men to rise after these sermons and express a desire for a new life. So there was little wonder, in that audience, that more than one responded to that great appeal. One penitent there was, sitting in a seat on the aisle, who was urged by others. The little lady sitting behind whispered to him words of encouragement; he smiled and shook his head; she whispered again; he wavered, he considered, he rose to his feet, and went forward.

To the preacher such responses came as the most welcome fruit of his labour, the hire which really satisfied. But his joy was almost sadness that night, when this last penitent came forward. Without doubt there was joy among the angels, but was there joy in the heart of Milton Stroud? Doctor Middane, unregenerate swindler, might well be a subject for scorn, but what would a soft-hearted woman say to Henry Vancil Doane, repentant, converted, seeking a chance to show that he also might soar again?

XXXVIII

MONEY TO GIVE AWAY

THERE might be doubt in some minds as to the genuine quality of Middane's conversion, but none existed in the mind of Johnny Langston. He was quite disgusted with the credulity displayed by some of his friends, especially the old doctor.

"I've seen it done before, Doc," he assured him. "It's the same principle as tickets for soup. It's the Chinese rice-Christian dodge. I'm easy, I'll admit it; but don't ask me to believe that fellow. The very fact that he says he repents makes me all the more sure that he doesn't."

"No good talkin' to me, Johnny," the old doctor responded. "I ain't the judge. If a man comes to me an' says he wants to begin all over again, all I can say is 'Come along,' ye understan' me. Don't make no diff'runce who he is nor how bad he's been. God's forgiveness is big 'nuff for anybody or anything. Who 'm I to say a man's too bad? Supposin' I send him away, an' arter all he's honest? No sir, 'Whosoever will' takes in Middane, so fur as I'm concerned."

"I'm going to quote Bible on you, Doctor," persisted Johnny. "Doesn't it say, 'Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them'?"

"It shorely does, Johnny. It shorely does. I'm glad to find ye knowin' s' much. That's all you an' me's got to go by. This fellow's new life ain't hardly commenced yet. He's showin' all the fruit ye can expect in ownin' up that he's been all wrong an' wants to right 'bout face."

"And how much does he want to do it?" sneered Johnny.

"He wants it this much. He's been here an' offered Mary to supply her with the names of as many people as he can—the people as bought his Oxyjuvenator, ye understan' me."

"Do you mean so that she may pay back the money to them?"

"That's what I'm told."

"The last I heard he was talking of getting an injunction to restrain her from squandering the estate."

"Well, he won't git no injunction. He's offered to help her spend it, instead."

"I don't doubt he'd like to help her spend it."

"I'd oughtn't to say 'spend.' Give it back to people. He's willing to help her give it back."

"And is she going to let him?"

"She prob'ly will. She says it's as much his father's trouble as her father's an' he'd orter have as good a chanct to make good."

"So she is going to make him her manager?"

"That's what she says."

"He knows so much about it, having had so large a share in extorting it, that he would be the very man to make the refund if he were honest. But I can't trust him."

"Mary won't ask you to. She'll trust him herself. She says no man as wants to make restitootion shall lose the joy of it, if she can give it to him. She's a-thinkin' of her paw, ye understan' me."

"She may trust him too much. We must watch to see that she isn't imposed upon."

"Yes, we'll watch. But Mary's in better hands than ours."

The old doctor would rather be the victim of ninety and nine impostors than do an injustice to one repentant person. But Johnny was frankly sceptical, and so long as Mary retained him as her legal adviser he would keep a sharp eye on Henry Vancil Doane.

There was another matter of great importance to occupy Johnny's attention just at present. The old doctor was going back to The Castle. Doctor David and his young wife were going to take a brief Southern trip, and for purposes of recuperation would take with them Gladys Standlaws, who needed a vacation after the adventure, tragedy, and gloom of the recent weeks. Johnny schemed with his old chum David to bring his party back to Latham Centre at a certain particular time which he considered favourable for plans of his own. Meantime he must expedite work in Chicago, and get this project of Mary's well under way. Doane's proposal was peculiarly helpful if he could be held to its honest performance. He knew all about the books. He knew who had acted as agents. He had dealt personally with many of the victims. There was no man living who could so well assist in the great plan, did he honestly desire so to do. The work was to be carried on from the old offices of the Oxyjuvenator Company, and there Johnny established himself for a time. He engaged as many of the old employees as possible. It was Mary's desire that those who had been engaged in the old work—no matter how innocently—should as far as possible have a chance to exhibit their zeal in the new. It was a comforting thought to her that even the typewriters which had once clicked out deceptive letters for purposes of extortion would now write joyful notices of good news.

Doane produced long lists of names and addresses of purchasers. Johnny looked them over.

"These will do to start on," he said. "Give these to your bookkeepers and tell them to multiply the price paid at purchase four times, and on the sum compute compound interest from the date of purchase."

"It will take an awful lot of money," said Doane.

Johnny eyed him suspiciously.

"We know that very well, Mr. Doane. The more the better. It is our purpose in the next five months to deplete the Doane estate as heavily as possible. Your next work will be to look up more names. When you have found all you can, we will advertise for all buyers, no matter how old the purchase. Some of their claims that run back fifteen or twenty years will make a pretty sum. It's a happy prospect, isn't it?"

But Doane walked away without a word, and Johnny made no comment, but dictated instructions to the cashier that no vouchers were to be marked for payment unless they bore his initials.

Since the policy of the Oxyjuvenator Company had been to sell their instrument for the highest possible price but to consider any offer rather than lose a sale, the vouchers differed greatly in amount. The older refunds made a very considerable amount. In the first day's batch as they came to Johnny's hands there were vouchers for large sums. The very first one was for over six hundred dollars. He took it back to the bookkeeper.

"Are you sure this is correct?" he asked.

"All correct, sir. Verified by the machine."

"But the original purchase price was thirty dollars, in this case."

"Yes, sir, but it was nineteen years ago, and the instructions were to figure the highest rate of interest, compounded semi-annually. Then the thirty dollars being multiplied by four makes one hundred and twenty to begin with."

"I see," said Johnny. "It's the interest that counts. This job promises to be of quite unusual interest. Perhaps five months will be enough, after all."

"It takes a lot of such amounts to make as much as a million dollars," ventured the bookkeeper, "and there's a good many millions in the Doane estate."

"Right you are," said Johnny. "But we'll do our best. Let the good work go on."

XXXIX

MR. LANGSTON CELEBRATES ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

BACK to Latham Centre, back to The Inn, back to Mrs. Goodman and her doctor-husband and her Cupid baby, back to The Castle of Cheer. John Calhoun Langston is back for the day. He arrived on an early train, and on one that is due later he expects the arrival of Doctor David Williams, his pretty young wife, and another young woman, a nurse, whose beauty Johnny holds far above prettiness. And the day, by strange fortuity, is the fourteenth of February!

Johnny had work piled up in his office, but this was too important a day for working in an office. He could not settle down to it. Which is why he was bothering Mrs. Goodman so early in the morning.

"I wonder if Lawyer John Calhoun Langston is under the impression that Valentine's Day is a legal holiday. Do you suppose that he is, Precious?"

Mrs. Goodman addressed her inquiry to the only person present whom it would have been at all proper to address in such endearing terms, but she got no response, for he was but a mite of a man, speaking very little English at any time, and just now busily engaged in diverting Uncle Johnny.

"Tell your old muzzer something for me, you Cupid baby," Johnny answered through the same medium of communication. "Tell her it ain't any use to try to get Johnny to work to-day. It's quite hopeless. Tell her something is going to happen to-day. If it doesn't happen naturally, Johnny's going to make it. Tell her that your David and Elsie aren't the only people coming here."

"We know all about who else is coming, Johnny," Mrs. Goodman answered directly. "It's that fairy with the golden hair, wavy and bright, with the eyes of turquoise or was it sapphire, with the aureole of joy and so forth, that began to give you so much concern just about eight months ago."

"Yes, indeed. Only eight short months and it seems like a lifetime. Isn't it queer, Lady, how one forgets such little things as the colour of hair and eyes—how they are swallowed up in the personality? Now, if you hadn't reminded me, I'm not sure I could have told about those colours. I never think of 'em; they are now simply a part of a glorious being. I merely think of her as the embodiment of all that is beautiful, the crown of perfection, the one desirable above all desire, the greatest grace of nature's——"

"You may stop right there, Johnny. That is worse than the golden hair and turquoise eyes. Do you think I have nothing to do but listen to your rhapsodies?"

"Lady, I will be frank with you. This is going to be a great day for me; the calendar makers will all have to get out new stuff showing this date in letters of sapphire blue with a circle of pure gold. It may not be a legal holiday, but it will be a holiday from legal work. Work is a shocking thing to contemplate at such a time. I supposed, with Dave and Elsie coming, you would feel about as I do; and here you talk about work."

"And I must do more than talk about it. There's a thousand things to be done around this place before any one gets here, Johnny Langston."

"Have your own way about it, Lady. Perhaps you would like me to help you in some of these things?"

"No, Johnny, I can't say that I would. I know of but one way in which you could be really helpful to me and politeness forbids any direct mention of that."

"Don't spare me for the sake of politeness. Say it right out. 'Get out of here,' or 'Shoo,' or 'Scat,' or any other well-tried formula. If I go, Lady, I take with me this sprout of the house of Goodman."

"What did you call that baby, Mr. Langston?"

"I said 'sprout,' but it was unintentional. I should have said 'scion' which means just the same and sounds nicer: 'Scion of the house of Goodman.'"

"Much better. Perhaps you would better tell me just what you want me to do for you."

"You always do attribute motives to me, Lady. I might just as well be guilty as innocent. All that I want is a little accommodation."

"I knew there was something. Tell it right out."

"Well, you see what kind of a day it is. This is the first day in weeks that the roads have been passable. They're still pretty rough for tires, but last night's frost has made them hard enough so they will hold a machine up all right."

"Yes, and there will be ways to put your machine and its chauffeur to work. There will be quite a load of people to go out to The Castle."

"Right there is where Johnny needs your help. For this once all seats in the grey car are reserved. It is a private car."

" That's very unsociable at a time like this, Johnny, and I'd like to know why."

" Very well, Lady. Listen to my life's secret. Let us have everything very quiet. Dismiss all extraneous thoughts. I am about to tell you all. Wait! Come back here! Where are you going?"

" I am going to attend to my business until you get through with your foolishness."

" This isn't foolishness, Lady. This is serious earnest. Consider our situation a moment. Out at The Castle are the old doctor, Bissington Jones, Cass Banks, and several interested patients. Here in Latham Centre is Mrs. Goodman and Doctor Goodman, who is the owner of a very good five-passenger car and can use only three seats in it. Coming on the next train are Doctor David Williams and wife, the two other persons needed to fill Doctor Goodman's car. Also comes Miss Gladys Standlaws, who is clearly an extra. For her benefit a handsome, grey car is held in special reserve. Now, I fear that, unless properly manipulated, some foolish ordinary person will make an effort to get into the grey car, in which event its chauffeur would have a fit and be unable to proceed."

" Exactly; and you want me to be the manipulator, and crowd four great big grown people and one big baby into our poor old machine, to the peril of its springs, while you run that handsome touring-car with no occupant but a hundred and ten pound fairy. For shame!"

" Not for shame, Lady. To-day is a special day. You don't understand just why. You think this visit to The Castle is the only important thing that's going to happen to-day, but I have a much more important matter."

"Will it end in anything important?"

"It will end in the most important thing in the world."

"Important to Johnny Langston, you mean. I won't promise to help you at all."

But, in some way, when the train came in and the clamour and confusion of all manner of greetings had subsided, Johnny found that she had managed to give him his one and only passenger.

"Aren't some of the rest coming?" asked Gladys, just as she had asked the question once before.

"They are going with Doctor Goodman," replied the chauffeur. "The doctor can only take two in his car besides himself, Mrs. Goodman, and the baby, so of course that leaves you out. But I'll look after you. I'm a good driver."

"I've understood that you were," she replied. "But this isn't the road to The Castle."

"It's just as good a way," he assured her. "It's quiet but it's very nice."

"Very well. You may tell me all that has happened in Chicago since I left."

"We have begun to distribute the money. We divided two hundred and twenty thousand dollars among nine hundred people in the first two weeks. We have heard from many of them in reply. They do not know what to make of it. Many of them think there is a trap of some kind. They refuse to deposit our checks in the bank."

"Poor people! I suppose they are 'once bitten, twice shy.' Is Mary happy about it?"

"Mary is reasonably happy, although by no means satisfied. She is very particular, you know. She feels that she is executing a trust. She gives strict instructions to see that no one gets the refunded money but the rightful claimants, and she is worrying now because the newspaper stories have flooded us with impostors, and we have to spend a lot of time investigating."

" She will be happy when all of this is done, though."

" Do you think so?"

There was a note in the young man's voice that caused Gladys to look into his face in surprise.

" Do you think not?" she asked.

" Is there a very happy prospect ahead?" he asked. " She goes on for four or five months giving back this money. The three years are up. The remainder of the estate reverts to the trustees. She is again a penniless nurse. She has done what she can, but in the doing she has stirred up a multitude of claims and claimants and their cries for restitution fill the air and reach her wherever she goes. Will she be happy?"

Gladys presented a very sober face.

" Oh, I'm afraid not," she murmured. " I fear that she will be disappointed. She can only have happiness if she continues in possession of the fortune. These claims will run on for years and years."

" And you know what condition she must meet to continue in the fortune?"

" Oh, yes. She must marry Vance Doane. But is that such an awful thing? He used to be a rather decent fellow and if——"

" Would you be happy in marrying him?" asked the chauffeur, bringing his machine to a sudden stop.

" Oh, no!" replied the fairy. " But that's different. Why are we stopping?"

" Partly to argue this question and partly because there is some scenery here, just around the bend, that

I want you to look at. Tell me, why is it different?"

"Oh, it's different because—because——"

"Because you belong to some one else," he cried, holding out his hand to help her down.

"Thank you, but I don't believe I'll get out of the car. I don't seem to care for scenery to-day," she expostulated, a sudden rush of memory quickening her faculties.

"As you please. It isn't necessary that you should see it. It is just the same——"

"It's the piece of real estate that goes with Johnny Langston, isn't it?" she interrupted mischievously.

"How you do help me out. But don't think Johnny is going to make the mistake of again offering it with himself conditional. One mistake of that kind is enough."

"You haven't made any mistake," she faltered.

"I'm not going to make any," he assured her. "Houses and lands are trifling matters to-day. They are things to give away. We will give this away if you say so. But that isn't what I want to say. I want you to understand that I'm in serious earnest now, Gladys. I am offering you to-day all the honour and love that a man can offer to the woman who makes life to him either sunshine or gloom as she happens to be present or absent; a strong conviction that I am the one man who can give you most devoted service and an absolute knowledge that you are the one woman who can make my life worth while. Will you take it, Gladys?"

Gladys sat very still in the front seat, next the one which the driver had resumed. Her lips quivered and the dew of emotion glistened in the beautiful eyes which looked bravely up at him. And she needed to say no single word as Johnny's arm encircled her in his honest embrace.

"There's one other thing," he said a few moments later, when he allowed her to lift her head from his shoulder. "This is the great day—St. Valentine's Day—you remember the gift you wouldn't take at Christmas and I said you should have it again on Valentine's Day. It sparkles just as bright as ever. Try it on. I want to see if it fits."

"Oh, Johnny, you foolish boy," she assured him. "Of course it does. I've known that ever since Christman Eve."

"And never told me!" exclaimed Johnny. "For that you pay——"

XL

"KEEP A-HAMMERIN'"

WAS it the sentiment of the day that led Milton Stroud to seek an interview with Mary Standlaws on this same fourteenth of February? It was willingly granted, for Mary had not stilled the cravings of her heart.

"The work is satisfactory?" he asked.

"It is wonderful," she replied. "The people are unable to comprehend it."

"I am not surprised," said he. "And this Mr. Doane who is helping. Does he seem to be honest?"

"I believe Mr. Doane to be quite sincere," responded Mary, a little coldly, for her many tilts with Johnny had made the subject sore to pressure. "His help is invaluable to us at this time, and more than that, he himself is given the chance that my dear father would so joyfully have welcomed."

"And I am going to ask you to leave it with him, Mary. I am here for a purpose to-day, the purpose of asking you to come to me as my wife. I am a man. I need a mate. I need you and I must have you. It is God's will both for me and for you."

"Milton, are you sure of that?"

She looked steadfastly at him. Never before had she so used his name, but it did not stir his heart to passion, for the voice in which it came was like the voice that called out of the stillness of the night, "Samuel! Samuel!"

He began to argue the matter.

"Why not? Get away from the whole filthy business. Here is a man who says that he has decided to turn from his career of infamy, and be decent. Can you not leave the whole thing to him?"

And her reply was, "Can I, Milton?"

"I suppose you think he might be too weak; you think he might consider that we should not leave him without support. He might be tempted by the money. Many people have intimated that I am so tempted. They think that I want to marry you because I have some mysterious plan of seizing the entire estate. I would not have a penny of the money. All that I ask is that you leave it all. Let Doane distribute it alone, and you come to take your place as my wife."

"And do you think I could desert this trust now that it has come to me?"

"What do you mean by trust? Do you mean the Doane will? Are you going to meet all of its conditions even to the last?"

At last the secret was out. It was torture to think of her working in harmony with Doane, and all the time facing the temptation of that will. He wanted her to drop it all and come to him.

She looked at him in grieved surprise. He was all contrition.

"Oh, forgive my foolish words," he cried. "My heart is sore because of my longings which seem to find so little response. Will you end it for me by giving me your promise?"

"Mr. Stroud, you would not ask if you understood. I have a work here—a sacred trust. I am chained to it. These letters that pour in upon us only bind me the stronger. I can't leave it."

"Then I will say good-bye," he said, gravely. "One thing let me say as a last word. Be very watchful of this man Doane. If you need a helper I am at your call."

Involuntarily he squared his shoulders as if preparing for a new burden. Then he stepped from the room and was gone.

Out in the busy street Stroud stepped along mechanically, seeing sufficiently to preserve motor control but comprehending neither persons nor things. It was the same on the street-car, until slipping automatically into a vacant seat he acquired as seatmate one of the lambs of his flock. Although his recognition was slow, hers was very prompt, and she speedily brought him down from the clouds.

"I'm afraid you don't see your friends to-day, Reverend Stroud," she said in a cheerful voice. "It's all right to be looking up most o' the time, but when you want to meet us everyday people you have to look down. I wish't you'd look as glad to see me as I am to see you; honest, I do."

"I'm sure it's a great pleasure, Miss Jolley," the shepherd responded, gradually coming out of his trance.

"I'll take your word for it, Reverend, even if your looks is all against it," said the little lady. "Did you know I was coming to your church now?"

"I'm afraid I've been a little backward in meeting every one," apologized the minister; "but I did see you there one evening. You sat in an end seat, right on the aisle."

"Yes, I was right behind that terrible sinner you converted that night—leastways you did with the help of a ministering angel."

"I don't know that I quite understand," said Mr. Stroud. "Of course I see the propriety of including ministering angels in any conversion, but why particularly in this?"

"Oh, nothing. Only the angel did more than is common, I guarantee. Whispered things to him, you know—told him that was the way to win back public confidence—kind of egged him on to the deed."

"You seem to be remarkably well informed about the angel's doings?" Stroud smiled as he spoke.

"I am," admitted Miss Jolley. "You see, I was the angel."

Encouraged by her pastor's approval, Miss Jolley went on to tell of her own affairs.

"We've moved," she announced. "Brother has a better store and I have a perfectly splendid place for a sleeping-porch. And all along o' them Oxyjuvenator things. It was better'n putting money in the Building and Loan. Honest, it was!"

"You had bought one of the instruments?"

"I hate to admit it, but I was one o' them that bit. But the money we got back is something incredulous. Johnny Langston fixed us up and I can't help feel that he and Miss Mary stretched the figures for us. But goodness knows, we needed the money so bad I just didn't dare say anything stronger than oh!"

"It has helped you to new quarters?"

"It's just been the makin' of us. Honest to goodness, that Miss Mary is a perfect angel. Do you know, Reverend Stroud, one reason I came over to your church was expecting Miss Mary to be the pastor's wife. When's she coming?"

Stroud's thoughts flew back to the time—months ago—when the bright little woman had so kindly volunteered her aid, and he could take no offence at the question.

"I don't know that she will ever come," he said.

"Yes, she will if you want her," insisted Miss Jolley, divining the status of affairs. "She's yours, Reverend Stroud, I guarantee. I've known it since the day I watched her looking at you when you was sick abed at The Castle."

"I'm glad you think so."

"Oh, I know so. Honest to goodness, all you got to do is to keep a-hammerin'. The money don't make no difference. Keep a-hammerin'."

And as the car stopped for the angel to alight at her corner, the Reverend Milton Stroud mentally affirmed that he would keep a-hammerin'.

XLI

A HONEYMOON IN CHICAGO

JOHN CALHOUN LANGSTON and his charming young bride were spending their honeymoon in Chicago. Chicago! Certainly. It is a beautiful place for a honeymoon for the initiated who know how and where to seek the quiet beauty and peace and culture and refinement which is concealed beneath its armour-plate of booming projects and gigantic performances. And Johnny and Gladys, both knowing Chicago very well, were among the initiated.

But the special reason for their choice was the presence of Mary. They felt that she needed their support and a touch of their happiness. They lived in her beautiful mansion, and the fairy bride revelled in a return to the luxury in which she had been reared. They filled the great house with happiness and laughter. The rose-tint of their honeymoon spread itself over Mary's projects in the early hours of morning and in the evening they insisted that she join them in their bridal excursions and frolics. Yet Mary was not happy. Gladys knew it, and so of course did her lawyer husband, who was still his sister-in-law's legal adviser.

"She has a good time but she isn't happy like I am," Gladys told Johnny.

"It would be different, perhaps, if she had as much cause for happiness," said the bridegroom, complacently patting his chest.

"Conceited boy! You belong to Mary as well as to me. Why can't you make her happy, too?"

"I'm not just the man for it," admitted Johnny.

"Do you think Mr. Stroud is?"

"What I think makes very little difference unless she thinks so too. Stroud intimates that she has told him that her mission comes first."

"I know just exactly what she told Mr. Stroud. He is very easily put off, I think. You would suppose that a man who is offering himself against millions of dollars would be a little more aggressive."

"Not Stroud's kind of a man. That's just the reason he would not be."

"Vance Doane isn't held back by any such delicacy. But of course he is bringing millions instead of taking them away."

"You don't think she will agree to marry that man, Gladys?"

"I didn't say she would; but you couldn't blame her. What is the poor girl to do? Here's the time almost gone—scarcely a month left. She's anxious to fill father's wishes, and I can see other things too that would tempt her. I tell you, Mr. John Langston, since I've been living in this beautiful home and having everything just like I used to years ago, I should just dislike terribly to go back to nursing in an institution."

"Don't be afraid, little girl, you aren't going back to it."

"I'm not afraid; and I suppose I ought to be ashamed to say such things, because nursing is just grand and I was always happy. But oh, these beautiful things—how lovely they do seem when you have them again! I'm afraid I never could give them up, and it's going to be a horrible temptation even to Mary."

"But you wouldn't have her marry Doane?"

"Why not? I can remember when she was engaged to Vance and we all liked him well enough. You just seem terribly unreasonable about that poor man."

"Perhaps you don't remember that he's the man I rescued you from."

"Rescued me! Hear the boy talk. Rescued me! I just knew you were conceited. I suppose you will talk about that rescue as long as we live. I just want you to remember, my dear husband, that if you do no better work pursuing the next man who runs away with me you may go wifeless all your days."

"Don't worry, little girl, you are never going out of my sight again. I wish Mary was as safe."

"Of course if she doesn't marry and keep the fortune it won't be as bad for her as it would be for a butterfly thing like me. She always did love nursing and I suppose she will be happy again."

"I'm not so sure, my dear. You have to work your imagination a little to put yourself in her place. She regards it as her peculiar mission to see that reparation is made to all who suffered by the Oxyjuvenator business. There were thousands of them. We have reached a great many, but letters continue to pour in. They will not stop because she is poor. Some of them will be cases of real merit such as will tear the heart of a sensitive woman like Mary. She might escape from mail, but people will continue to seek her in person, and as a poor woman, without the protection of a large establishment, she will be far more at their mercy than now. A perfect avalanche has started slipping. I don't know what will ever stop it."

"We will take her away then, and hide her."

"Yes, I imagine you hiding your little sister Mary under your protecting wing."

"Well, then she must marry Vance and keep the money at its useful work."

"And thus submit herself to a life of greater misery than all the outsiders in the world could put upon her!"

"You are so sure that he is insincere."

"I cannot feel any other way about him."

"Yet he has helped distribute a lot of the Doane fortune and you said yourself that he seemed quite active about it. Doesn't that seem like sincerity?"

"He has helped us to give away nearly three million dollars, but that hardly dents the Doane fortune. I have never supposed him to be a common rogue. He is the kind of a clever man who would play his part so perfectly that the only possible weakness in it would be a little overdoing. I think he is overdoing it now."

"Yes, I know you do. But Mary doesn't."

"No, Mary believes him sincere. She puts him in your father's place and every time he makes a particularly good stroke she is greatly rejoiced for the very reason that she sees her father doing it."

"Perhaps, but Mary isn't thinking of Vance Doane as a father, not by any means." And this was said in a tone that might well be significant of inside information.

XLII

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS' GRACE

LET us now study the case of Mary Standlaws. The time when she must definitely decide to marry Henry Vancil Doane or utterly renounce the Doane fortune is at hand. She is in the last month. As to her heart—but we are not considering her heart at this time, we are trying to draw conclusions of logic. If she does not marry Doane she must, in a few weeks, go back to her occupation as a nurse—no terrible prospect, for she has spent happy years in that vocation. But she will go back with her father's purpose only partially fulfilled.

And why should she go back? Here is a man anxious to keep her—a man not ill-favoured, not without charm, one to whom she once committed her trust and whom, once on a time, she confidently expected to marry. He has been astray—far astray—but he has returned and with such penitence as seems amazing; and no one better knows how to admire a penitent sinner than Mary Standlaws. So earnest is he that he is now engaged in giving away all of his money. He is very humble. He is very desirous to atone for the past. Yet he makes no effort to conceal that the greatest, most intense desire of his life is that she will marry him. If she does he is a wealthy man and able to accomplish great benefactions with his wealth. If she does not, he, who is nobly giving away his family fortune, has no fortune, is at once a beggar. Shall she make him a beggar?

There is yet another argument. Shall she make herself a beggar? Should she do so she may continue her humble ministrations as a nurse and possibly satisfy herself that she is living a life of devotion. But should she yield to the desires of this repentant, self-effacing man and marry him, she is placed in such a position that she may be one of the great benefactors of the age. She may positively fulfil her father's desire to restore fourfold—fulfil it to the last possible finality—and even then have money left for public benefactions. She will be in the public eye, she will be honoured by all, she will have great influence in any enterprise that meets her favour, she will be able to gratify every wish. And this in contrast to the grey routine of an everyday nurse who, indeed, is respected and honoured, yet must often be weary unto death, and with incredible swiftness runs to meet the time when she shall be laid aside as a thing of outlived usefulness.

Ponder these things as you think of Mary Standlaws, especially if your hearts are inclined to censure if her negative should be no longer very positive.

Let us also consider Henry Vancil Doane, better known to this record as Doctor Middane. It is not given to us to know the thoughts and emotions that inspired him when he rose at the conclusion of Milton Stroud's sermon and claimed a new life. How mixed were his purposes, how greatly influenced by the softened spirit carried from the death scene of a recent day, how much actuated by worldly motives such as were whispered by "the angel" who suggested that the step would square him with the world—these things we may never know.

But he takes up daily work that is in absolute contravention to all his prior business principles. Where he has strained his nerves to cheat he now tries to be generous; where he has taxed his ingenuity to steal the people's money he must now use more ingenuity in giving back certain amounts to certain people and to none other. What a change comes over the spirit of his work. No longer is it necessary for him to issue secret instructions to agents, no longer requisite to find a fresh lie for every new letter, to review earlier correspondence with great care to ensure one lie bearing out the other. No longer is his mail a mass of complaints which must be brazenly ignored or ingeniously palliated. He can walk the streets now as a man among men. If a finger points at him it is that of wonder—possibly admiration—rather than derision and scorn. He is hiding nothing, he has nothing to conceal. The public knows all about his affairs and rather respects his stand.

If there were the weakest root of sincerity in his profession of conversion, Doane could not possibly have been more fortunate in a system of nourishing and developing that root, than by entering upon a course which forced him to give away money which he might well look upon as his own, and receive in return the gratitude, thanks, and blessings of the wronged yet forgiving people; acting, indeed, as one who sought to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

One other ennobling influence urged the man to truth and sincerity, and that was the daily companionship of Mary. There is no need to question the sincerity of his love for her; it was no task for any man of the least degree of eligibility. And in view of the will of his father and its conditional clause, Doane felt himself decidedly eligible.

Mary spent a portion of each working day at the Oxyjuvenator office, as also did Johnny. There was an immense mail, much of which demanded their personal inspection.

The letters were of all varieties, in all degrees of orthography, in many different languages, amusing, effusive, abusive, pathetic, tragic, ludicrous; they struck every note of human interest.

One that Mary read with some amusement showed that at least one acquaintance existed who made no personal connection between her and the Oxyjuvenator Co.

Dear Sir: I am a single lady (not because I have had no chance to be otherwise) who is much in need of about a hundred dollars. I did not buy an Oxyjuvenator but I have always felt that I missed a great opportunity in not patronizing your wonderful—for I am sure it must be wonderful—instrument. I bought several other Oxy things and I can send you receipts to show that I have always been a liberal patron (perhaps I should say patroness being a lady) of all such things as were brought before the public. I therefore claim my share of the profits you are distributing and the more so since I have only recently left an expensive sanatorium where I spent thousands of dollars ("Oh, the fibber!" said Mary) in pursuit of my health.

It was not the purpose to pay any wild claims of this nature, though many were received. To guard against imposition a requirement of the refund was the return of the instrument purchased. This requirement brought forth some singular, even surprising letters. For instance:

Oxyjuvenator Co.

Dear Sir: I am willing to admit that I do not exactly see through your scheme in asking me to return the Oxyjuvenator I bought and promising to refund the price. I have not asked you to make any refund. I can only suppose that you are all sold out and have lost the secret of the invention. I want to tell you that I would not take a thousand dollars for this little instrument which has cured all our family ailments and those of many neighbours for nearly ten years. One thing sure—you can't have it.

" You see they don't all think themselves swindled," said Johnny, as he handed Mary the letter. " Here's another very much like it."

Dear Sir: I do not understand why you are trying to refund the purchase price of the Oxyjuvenator outfits, but allow me to assure you that you are making a very great mistake. No one can possibly have overpaid for this instrument. We have used one in our family for six years and would not be without it.

But though there came several letters of such tenor the amusement they inspired was quickly overwhelmed by the tragic tone which ran through many of the pathetic screeds.

Dear Sir: I was glad to get your cheque. My husband who bought your outfit was a real sick man when he bought it and maybe that's why it never done him any good. We have never been able to put a stone to his grave and your money will give us the chance.

The touch of sadness this produced was a little relieved by another in the same mail.

Dear Sir: I have hunted the Oxyjuvenator up and am glad now that I did not throw it away. I used it faithfully as directed in the book, but got worse all the time. Finally I went to a doctor to ask him to look at it, and he said if I would put it out on an open porch with my bed on top of it and sleep out there he thought it would do less harm than any other way. From then on I began to get better, but I know too much to think the instrument did it and am glad to get my money back.

As the newspapers continued to give publicity to the work there came a great flood of letters from people whose claims were supported only by their imaginations. All the people who had ever bought any kind of a fake health apparatus—people who had ever suffered any kind of a swindle—people who never had been swindled but were quite willing to swindle—these and many others poured in their torrent of appeals. It made the work slower because the genuine cases had to be carefully sifted from the mass. But though there were many spurious letters there remained a saddening number of the genuine.

One morning Doane brought Mary a letter which was the most heart-rending of any.

Dear Sir: I cannot return your Oxyjuvenator because I threw it in the stove. My baby was the most beautiful baby in the world, and he was sick with the diphthery last winter, and I used it the way the book said and kept on using it, but he didn't get any better and finally I sent to town for a doctor, and then it was too late! I threw the thing in the stove. You can keep your money. It won't never bring back my baby.

Oh, the heartache of this single letter; the heartache in the writing of it and the heartache in the reading of it! Mary had shed no tears over this distress heretofore, but now she buried her face in the desk, safe in the privacy of the inner office, and wept for the sore heart of the young mother.

She felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up into the face of Doane.

"I will go and see this woman," said he. "It is awful to think of such misery; but it is folly to say that money cannot help. Perhaps she is already regretting her haste."

"Yes, go," said Mary. "Do everything that is in any way possible to give her comfort. And I am so anxious to know just what you do. I shall count every minute. Let me know just as soon as you get back to town."

It was evening when Doane returned and he was obliged to seek Mary at her home. He found her alone.

"Did you see her?" she cried. "Could you do anything? Is there anything at all that we can do?"

"It was a sad home," he replied. "I never for a moment supposed that such sadness could be wrought by what we were doing. But, yes, there are things we can do. There are other children and, as you guessed, she is glad enough now to let us make up to them. Oh, it is far better than doing nothing."

"It is. It is!" Mary ejaculated. "It is doing something and we must not be lax in it."

He would have been slow indeed had he failed to see this opportunity.

"No, we must not be lax in it," he said. "And I am bound to remind you again that the time is going fast. Very soon and the opportunity will be no longer ours."

"It is true," admitted Mary, gravely, and composed as few women could have been under such stress. "It is true. But if I decide now it will not be because I am ready. I am as unready as ever. I must be honest with you. I should not consider your question seriously were it not for the urgent conditions."

"That is all right. Leave me out of the question. Do not consider me at all. I will be as nothing. I will be non-existent. I swear I will not obtrude myself. I hope, and I will not conceal the hope, that the day will soon come when it will be your pleasure to take me as your husband in fact as well as in name. But now the important thing is the name. Think of these poor people. Must it be that our power to help them will cease forever in a few more days? There are only a couple more weeks, Mary. Do you not hear the plea of your father to restore fourfold?"

Is it a great wonder that instead of the positive "No!" which had heretofore rung out, the white-lipped girl said only: "Oh, the poor people. I must do my father's will. But give me yet a day to think.

Twenty-four hours! Come to me in twenty-four hours."

"Very well," responded Doane. "It is now nine o'clock. At nine to-morrow evening I will hear your decision."

XLIII

MUCH MAY HAPPEN IN A DAY

MARY STANDLAWS opened her eyes to the morning with a feeling of impending disaster. As she shook off the last shreds of troubled sleep she came to a full realization of her distress and its foundation. This was her sacrificial day. She had begged for twenty-four hours, but it was not that it would make any difference, not that it would bring any enlightenment, not that it would lessen the urgent stress of demand felt by her over-sensitive conscience. The only thing that so short a time could do might be to give some slight degree of reconciliation to the decision and some help to enter into the compact—she could not bring herself to call it an engagement—with more assured control and better grace.

She was not to go to the office, for several days before Johnny had chosen this day for one of his honeymoon trips and had inveigled her into a promise of support and company.

" And I will not put a shadow on their happy day," she declared to herself. " I will throw off this depression and give myself to the enjoyment of the day as a sane person."

The resolve was easier than the performance, for even at the breakfast table she was sufficiently distraught to awaken Johnny's comment.

" She has the appearance of the young wife of Bluebeard begging sister Ann to look for the coming of her brothers," he said to his bride; not entirely a chance shot, for Mary had given Gladys her confidence.

"Sister Ann knows of but one brother at all likely to come to Mary's aid," replied Gladys, significantly.

"He is riding fiercely. He'll do his best," Johnny assured her.

The grey car and its usual chauffeur were ready for their use. In the cool freshness of the early morning they rolled along the splendid boulevards of the great city, and passing from thence to the well-travelled country roads still found good rolling surface. The freshness had gone, and the heat of the early summer day was just beginning to settle upon them, when Johnny ran his car into the cool shade of a level woodland road, which, after a mile of winding in and out, opened before them and disclosed the lake, with a little stretch of its waters running right up on a pleasant beach.

"What a delightful place," cried Mary. "I didn't suppose that such a beauty spot existed so near to us."

"It is, indeed, a beauty spot," Johnny agreed. "It is, for to-day, the property of yours truly and a friend who will shortly arrive with his large family. I rather think, in fact, that I hear some of the family now."

Gladys looked at her bridegroom with menacing eyes. "You said nothing to me about mixing us up with a family," she declared.

"I am not one to brag of my benevolences. I am as the shrinking violet," modestly declared Johnny. "To-day we are the hosts."

Mary only smiled. It made no difference to her. The more people who came, the more there would be to divert her thoughts.

The car announced by its rattle now came into view around the curve. Without doubt it was a family car, in much the same sense that a horse becomes a family horse after it has seen its best days and lost the fire of its youth. It was loaded full; it was even loaded more than full, for the seat of the driver was the only one not honoured with the compliment and confidence of double carriage. Mostly it was a woman underneath and a baby for the second layer. Scarcely had it drawn to a stop before another nosed into view, and back of that could be seen a third, which after all took good place in the rank, for there were many to follow.

"A settlement picnic!" ejaculated the wondering Gladys, as she saw the crowd and read the banners. "Johnny, why ever did you bring us?"

Then Milton Stroud stepped out of the last car and she was answered.

"Yes, that is Stroud," admitted Johnny. "It is the first of his early summer fresh-air outings. You saw the cloud of dust, sister Ann?"

Johnny had little time for making explanations. He was living up to the part of host in the whole-hearted manner which had been born in him and grown with his growth of honest years. Was there a shy woman scarcely knowing what she might or might not do, her embarrassment was scarce manifest before this helpful host was making her acquaintance and giving her the freedom of his domain. Was there a little mother with a big baby; who like Johnny to relieve her of her burden? Was there a group of boys, wild and untamed, Johnny must give their energies an outlet. This was no new thing to him, and although Gladys had not known his full plans they had been thought out and developed days ahead.

It was not to be supposed that institutional nurses could be near such a scene and not of it. When Stroud found Mary she had an ailing youngster in her arms, and two who were not ailing hanging over the back of her seat, all four confidential and happy, yet no more happy than the relieved mothers who were at rest for once.

"Johnny told me he would try to provide some nurses. I might have known you would be willing to come," said the minister, heartily.

"We came on Johnny's misrepresentation," she explained. "He now says he intended to give us some real pleasure as a surprise. But we are glad to be here. I can think of no way in which I would prefer to spend this particular day."

Stroud could give reasons of his own for counting it a particular day, but hers he did not know.

"It is always happiness to see the pleasure of these children and mothers in one of our country days. This is the first of the season and you help us to a most auspicious opening. If you have too many babies here I will take some of them to their mothers."

"This my muvver," said one of the sturdy ones astride the seat-back, just old enough to understand, and patting Mary's cheek with tender affection to signify his preference.

Mary flung her free arm around him and hugged his chubby little body to her breast. "Of course I'm his mother," she cried, with a laugh of happiness such as only those who have felt the pat of baby fingers can understand.

"My muvver too," claimed the ailing one, snuggling his thin little frame close in the arm which he was fortunate enough to occupy.

"Tommy got two muvvers," solemnly explained the precocious number one. "Lovey muvver and pretty muvver."

There could be no thought of relieving her of such a precious load, and Stroud went his way, for on such a day he was the heart of the proceedings and, filling his function, supplied vitality to every part. Johnny might reasonably have been classified as the lungs, for he exhibited airy, noisy characteristics which made him the delight of the older children, and all the day long he superintended oxygenating functions such as excursions on the lake, wading, swimming, foot-races, and swinging, in an exuberant activity that knew no exhaustion.

It was late in the afternoon before Stroud again sought Mary. The sturdy little chaps had gone to play elsewhere, but the ailing one still demanded her attention, though for the sake of giving better rest she had induced him to lie in a hammock.

"We are getting ready to go home, now," said the minister. "I am very, very glad that you came. I want this to make an appeal to you—the appeal of the living against the dead. The appeal of the active, triumphant service you can do in the present against the atoning for a buried past. I want you to see what it might be to join me in this ministry. I must take this boy to his mother, now."

Mary's eyes were downcast but the tears did not flood them until the little one cried in protest:

"No go to muvver. Muvver here. Pretty muvver carry Tommy home."

It was a weak thing to do. No sensible nurse would yield to such preposterous pleadings. But there was room in the grey car, and the others certainly were overcrowded. So Mary took the young mother and one of the sturdy ones, and frail little Tommy had his heart's desire in going home with his "pretty muvver." He lay in her arms, close held, until he was fast asleep; but although the little head lay pillowed so close to that throbbing heart he did not know of its tumult, nor hear the piteous cry: "I cannot! Oh, I cannot!"

XLIV

STRIKING SEVEN

DOANE spent the day at the office of the Oxyjuvenator Company. The day loomed before him as one of prodigious length, yet he had many things to occupy it. He desired to present himself, that night, at nine o'clock, with the argument of a clean record, and it entailed much preparation. He had dropped his connection with and promulgation of the Hermann cure, just as he had dropped the pose of Doctor Middane, at the time he assumed his new character and position as Mary's manager in disposing of the Doane fortune and making restitution to Oxyjuvenator purchasers. He did not even style himself Doctor Doane, although the degree of M.D. was rightfully his. It seemed best to shove all of his medical pretensions into the background since none were of especially good odour.

Doane had followed the study of medicine and secured his degree, at a time when his father thought that the prestige of a graduate doctor at the head of the concern would help to give the Oxyjuvenator Company a better standing. Then had come his father's death, the sudden stoppage of his access to the Doane millions and even his control of the Oxyjuvenator profits. It was necessary that he should make money and natural that he should make it by swindling the public, so he had seized eagerly at the opportunity offered by the Hermann cure and had established New Hope Sanatorium.

He was now prepared to show that this was all in the past, that his skirts were clear of connection with all crooked purposes, that he now lived with the sole object of making restitution. He did rather incline to the opinion that fourfold was a little extreme, yet restitution of some sort was becoming a rather pleasant occupation, and even fourfold would not seriously damage the Doane fortune, for it had grown a hundredfold in its passage through the hands of a man who was a born master of finance.

There was little to divert him through the long day and he rather welcomed the interruption of a man who insisted on seeing him in person. He was a man of foreign appearance and the dress of a workingman, but he spoke very good English.

" You remember me? " he inquired of Doane. " You sold me one of those Oxyjuvenators, yourself, a few years ago. You remember me? "

As it happened Doane did remember him. He had dealt with him personally and the man had peculiarities which made him one to remember. He had heard that he was a great leader in his own class and some spoke of him as an anarchist.

" I think I remember you. I am sorry about the instrument if it has harmed you, but we are making restitution to all who come," he told the man.

" Restitution! " cried the man. " Are you able to bring back the dead? My daughter—the one that the instrument was to cure—has gone to her grave."

" I am very sorry," Doane assured him. " But perhaps it is not our fault. All that we can do is to give a little financial help. No doubt you came for that, having heard what we are doing. We are paying back the purchase price four times over and interest added. For our own protection, to guard against being worked again and again with the same instrument, we are asking that it be returned to us when we refund the money."

"So you want the thing back?" asked the man.

"We must have it wherever possible."

"I think I can get it for you," the stranger said, with a curious light of gratification in his eyes. "Will you be here when I come back, if I hurry and get back this evening?"

"We close at six. I shall be here myself a little later doing some special work, but don't be much later or I can't wait. Seven o'clock is my limit. I have a very important engagement in another part of town at nine."

Vance Doane was pacific indeed in such conciliating efforts; but, then, the man's daughter was dead.

"I'll be here long before seven," exclaimed the man, as he hurried away. "You wait for me."

In the course of the afternoon Doane had the bookkeeper look up the case, and a cheque was prepared for two hundred and two dollars in settlement.

At six o'clock the office emptied save for Doane, but over half an hour passed before the visitor appeared. In his clenched hand he carried the Oxyjuvenator. He laid the instrument carefully on a desk. It was wrapped round and round with the bulky conducting-cords, and clasped tightly over all were the contact disks, so that the only metal in view was the nickelled ends. But Doane knew it was the Oxyjuvenator. He could tell it in any guise.

The visitor scanned the check with a curious scrutiny.

"Two hundred and two dollars!" he exclaimed. "Why two hundred and two?"

"You paid thirty-five dollars for the instrument. We multiply this by four and add compound interest."

"Two hundred and two dollars won't pay for my girl. Keep your money."

He threw the cheque on the desk in front of him. Doane had another argument which he had often known to work well. Going to the safe he brought the money in bills and offered it to him.

It was repulsed with scorn.

"Give me my girl," he cried. "What is money?"

"I am very sorry about your daughter," said Doane, feeling how lame were the words.

"Did you ever really think you would cure her?"

A few months ago Doane would have given an emphatic yes. Now he hung his head.

"I wonder if you remember how you sold that to me and the promises you gave. You were a younger man then. I also was younger—ages younger. Do you remember how you said it would cure any case of consumption that did not have large cavities? Do you remember how you examined Lucia and said she had no cavities and would be surely cured? How sure you were that day. How sure we were. You told us to use it every evening at seven o'clock after I got home from work. Oh, we used it faithfully. At first we felt sure she was better; then soon we weren't so sure. When we had to admit she was losing we examined all the directions again to see if we had been following them exactly."

stopped as he realized that the sound did not increase but lessened. He gazed around him curiously.

"Tick, tick, tick!"

It was clear now. The ticking came from the thing upon the desk! In a second a thousand thoughts raced through his electrified brain. This man—this anarchist—what had he planned? What lay concealed beneath the mass of cords which wrapped the instrument?

What meant the tick, tick, tick, which sounded now so surely from the ugly package, the inert machine?

"Tick, tick, tick!"

Another second gone! Dare he seize the diabolical contrivance and hurl it away? Suddenly the ticking was drowned in the loud striking of the clock. He flashed at the dial one terrified glance as the words of the anarchist came sweeping into his brain. It was striking seven!

Johnny Langston would never know if Doane's conversion were consistent.

. . . .

In the throng of curious people which gathered so quickly was a workman of foreign appearance. He was very active in helping to extinguish the flames which sprang up in several places, and he was seen to assist in lifting the dead form of the doctor. In a brief interval when he was *not* seen, he picked up a distorted instrument that might once have resembled a section of nickelled gas-pipe, and, evidently having some interest in hiding the rod-shaped affair, he hastily concealed it in his clothing.

. . . .

The grey automobile was late, for Mary lingered in depositing the frail little one who had slept in her arms; but she knew, as she opened the door, that she was in good time for her engagement.

Her maid met her at the door.

" They've been trying to get you or Mr. Langston on the 'phone for a long time," the girl declared. " There's been a bad accident and I think they said the works was destroyed."

XLV

AND STROUD KNOCKED AT THE DOOR

JOHNNY LANGSTON was again returning to Latham Centre in the rear Pullman of the overland express and again did he have Milton Stroud for a fellow-passenger, but, no longer strangers, they had spent the journey in the most intimate conversation.

"Almost home!" proclaimed Johnny, rising from his seat.

"A year ago I didn't suppose it would ever seem in the least like home to me," said Stroud, with a laugh.

"A man's home is where his treasure is kept," said Johnny, significantly. "Here's wishing you the best."

The explanation of this remark and wish lay in the fact that Mary, seeking to recuperate from shock and strain, had come back to the place which seemed to her most like home—The Castle of Cheer. She had been there several weeks resting, building up her strength, and waiting for her lawyers to tell her where she stood. Stroud was an unannounced guest of Johnny Langston.

"Do you think she will be glad to know your conclusions?" asked Stroud.

"It is for you to make her glad," replied Johnny. "That is why I am bringing you. But I anticipate no hard task for you. She has been very weary of the Oxyjuvenator business for some time past."

"If only we can get her to consider that her father's wishes are fulfilled."

"No one can do much more to fulfil them. With the plant and office destroyed and every record gone, no one could do anything more with the Oxyjuvenator business unless to invite every one who has a grievance to come to the till and put in his hand."

Stroud did not journey all the way to The Castle afoot, this time. He went in the grey car until the gates were in sight.

"Let me out here, Johnny," he begged. "I don't want her to see me until she has settled things in her mind a little. I will come in later."

So he walked along a lane and through the fields and again entered the Castle grounds by the back way.

In the grounds he found the old doctor, who met him with great rejoicing.

"Yo're lookin' something like," cried the old man. "Not much like the tired-out tramp as come here a year ago, ye understan' me. Reckon mebbe ye come to git the perskiption filled."

"I have come to try," he admitted.

"An' what ye feared about?" asked the doctor.

"Because I have tried it with poor success before, and after all, conditions aren't much changed."

"I thought they was all changed. She don't have that money to worry her no more, does she?"

"It's just as she pleases, I understand."

"Thought she lost it all 'cause she didn't marry the man as was killed."

"Not exactly. Johnny notified the trustees to whom the estate was supposed to revert that he intended to contest their claim; that, Doane being dead, the condition of marriage to him was impossible of performance and therefore Mary's title remained good. The trustees suggested a compromise. It seemed the old man had named them as trustees not because of any interest in exploring but because they were old cronies. He had left no great amount to the society in any event. His great desire was that Mary should marry his son and make a man of him. If she did not he dared not trust the son with more than a competence. So, failing the marriage, he provided for annuities of ten thousand dollars each to his son, to Mary, to Gladys, and to the exploring society. All the remainder of his estate was to be a trust for charitable and benevolent purposes subject to the control and direction of such individuals or company as the trustees might designate. So these trustees offer a very simple way out. Knowing why Mary desires the money they simply propose that the provisions of the will be followed, that they take their annuity, and they will designate Mary or anyone she chooses as the person to distribute the remainder in charity."

"Clever men!" commented the old doctor, beaming approval. "Clever men! Ever'buddy gits what they wants an' no fightin', ye understan' me."

"But tell me what good it does Mary. Doesn't it leave her with as great a burden as ever?"

"It does if Mary shoulders the burden. But you ain't the strong man ye look, if so be ye let her, ye understan' me."

"I'm only too willing to relieve her. But I am a minister of the gospel, a man with a charge to keep. I have living people needing my ministrations. I cannot give my time to clearing the record of the dead."

"Meanin' that she may want to keep on at what she's been a-doin'. I thought everything was burned up so nobody could tell who ought to be helped."

"That's a trifling matter to an ingenious woman like Mary. If she made up her mind that it was the right thing she would track out the victims of the Oxyjuvenator with detectives rather than give them up."

"And mebbe she'd be all right. She don't want nobuddy to suffer as she can help, ye understan' me. I was jest a-goin' over to see Mary, but I reckon mebbe I better let you go instead."

"No, Doctor, I am not ready to see her yet. You go. Anything you can do to get that prescription ready for me I shall appreciate."

"I told ye I wasn't filling perskiptions," said the doctor. Yet he stepped into the cool room where Mary was resting with a resolve in his heart to do what he could.

Mary had just heard from her lawyer the news about the estate, and was anxious to talk to the doctor about it.

"Do you know what I would like to do with it all, Doctor?" she said, earnestly. "I would like to give it all to you."

"I'd like it, daughter; but I'm too old to spend it. The Castle of Cheer could use some of it but the rest'd be a burden."

"And I have no right to give it, for put into my hands in this way, it is more and more incumbent upon me to execute my trust."

"Meanin' to pay back all the pore folks as yore paw an' his partner made the money from?"

"Yes, that is my meaning. I still hear my father say restore fourfold. I can have no happiness until his name is cleared."

"Pride o' name! Pride o' family! How it does creep in, daughter. It ain't nowise doin' ye justice to think it takes a big place in yore heart, yet it creeps even into yore good work—pride o' name! Pride o' family! Is it wuth while to count it a purpose in life to clear the name o' one man—a dead man—a man who ain't only sinned but long ago been forgiven, ye understan' me."

"Does he know, do you think?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes, I think he knows, daughter. An' I think he loves ye for it. But I think, too, that he smiles at the love that prompts ye, for he knows it's a mistake, ye understan' me. He's where he can see everything now—the big things an' the little things—an' I reckon he's forgot 'at there's any importance 'bout what folks thinks of a dead man's name."

"Doctor!" she cried in a sudden outburst. "Am I wrong? Do you think that he does not care that I use this money for his wish?"

"There, there, daughter. I reckon it's all right with him, ye understan' me. But it don't make s' much difference to him as to us. He'd want ye to help any o' these people as ye could, of course, but he'd be jest as glad about it if ye was helpin' them as had been damaged by some other party, jest so ye was helpin'. I know some places the money's done good. I know that what you give Miss Jolley was just the makin' of her and her brother, and I know there's ben others, too. But it's doubtful if givin' 'em money often means help. Johnny told me 'bout the man as took his two hundred dollars an' had the greatest drunk of his life, an' the man as used his six hundred to start a saloon, an' the man as is writin' you to help him sue the rubber plantation that eat up his share—an' they's scores like 'em."

"And you don't think father would care so much about these same people being helped?"

"No, daughter, I can't say as I do. As long as he was here it was his duty, if he'd done a man harm, to set it right, but I don't know as takin' his money an' tryin' to give a little to ever'buddy as suffered any damage takes the place o' this."

"Such a hopeless task as it sometimes seems, Doctor. So many ways has the trouble gone on—so many are the people involved—so often has death stopped any reparation."

"Yes, daughter. That's always the way with sin. The sinner, he can be forgiven, for there's a boundless mercy great enough to cover the worst. But the sin—it goes on an' on, an' nothin' can wipe it out, an' nothin' can undo it, an' all the agonizin' in the world won't make up for it, an' all the wealth that ever was piled up won't pay for it."

"But when the man of old said, 'If I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man I restore fourfold,' Jesus said at once, 'To-day is salvation come to this house.'"

"It was jest like Him, daughter; jest like Jesus, that was. But it wasn't giving half his goods to the poor that bought the man his way into the kingdom, an' it wasn't a promise to restore fourfold that made Jesus speak them happy words about salvation. It was granted full an' free by a love 'at don't ask a starved, helpless, sinning body to do much more'n show willin', that's ready to take a man as quick as he shows interest enough to look for himself. All he'd done was to climb a tree to look over the crowd an' Jesus picked him out an' give him his chanct. It was jest the same with yore paw. If he'd lived he'd tried to pay the money back, but it wouldn't have made him no better place in the kingdom, daughter. He don't get that for what he's done. It's God's gift. He don't get it for what you can do for his name, daughter. It's his a'ready."

She sat in silence for a little and he said nothing more.

"Oh, I know it all, Doctor. I know all of this, with my mind," at last she said. "Yet it does seem that I should do something; that there is some work of reparation for me to do."

"Yes, that's yore nature, daughter. You shorely want to do yore duty. But it ain't doin' yore duty that makes happiness, though ye can't well be happy without doin' it. It ain't shuttin' yoreself up to vows o' consecration 'at makes happiness, though consecration is serene an' peaceful. It's love that's God's way for happiness in this life. An' it's love that'll fill that cravin' for something to do. An', Mary, don't be afeared lest ye waste that love on some one who ain't suffered by reason of the faults of yore family. It's jest as good to give yore love to one needy sinner as to another."

And just then Stroud knocked at the door.

XLVI

FOURFOLD!

MILTON STROUD'S reception was not one to be described in staring, written words. It is, perhaps, enough to say that it was entirely satisfactory to him—and therefore should be to us. There were many things to be settled, and once they were safely embarked on the river of acknowledged mutual love, the vexing currents of repressed feeling no longer contending, they were quick to find a settlement.

They walked in the quiet country near The Castle, next morning. Almost all the difficult points were planned. They had just decided that a company should be formed to administer the Doane estate for charitable purposes. Any person who had suffered from the Oxyjuvenator or any other such fraud should be helped, though not necessarily with money. In each state should be established a department for public enlightenment and for exposure of medical charlatans.

" And I know exactly the man for manager! " exclaimed Mary.

" He will have to be a good business man," Stroud reminded her.

" He is. He is a thoroughly trained lawyer."

" He should be both able and sympathetic," urged Stroud.

" He is both! " cried Mary, delighted.

"He must be a man not easily imposed upon and with a wide knowledge of human nature."

"He meets the requirements exactly," she insisted.

"Who is this most admirable person?" asked Stroud. "I begin to have a disturbed, jealous feeling."

"You know him well. He is one of your best friends."

"Not Johnny Langston?"

"Johnny! No. I can impose upon Johnny, myself."

"Then I give up."

"I wonder at you. It is Bissington Jones, of course. He has taken up practice in Chicago again, but Doctor Goodman says he would do far better at less exacting work. He is so brilliant that the demand for his work soon overwhelms him. This will be just the thing for him."

"And can you not find something for his friend Cassius and Mr. Nein and Mrs. Swenk and Luigi and the nurses and——"

"You have no right to joke, sir. I wish I could find something for poor Cassius, for he doesn't do well at all. But of course I'm going to press into service all of my friends so far as possible. Johnny is to be general counsel. Doctor Goodman and Mr. Holmes are to act with you as directors. Luigi—I don't know how we shall use Luigi. If I am to give it all up for you I must use my friends to fill my place."

"It will take a great many to fill it, but I know they will be very happy to try. All these things we have planned will use a vast income, but there will be still a part of the great Doane fortune for other uses."

The minister had many plans in his mind which would offer great avenues for the distribution of wealth destined for benevolence, but he preferred to leave all suggestions to Mary. A new look of happiness added joyous colour to the peace of her countenance and she was a vision to charm the heart of any man and make him feel that all material things were gross.

"Milton!" she cried, with radiant face, as she slipped her hand into his arm and turned his face toward The Castle; "look now at my vision of great things. There stands The Castle crowning the hill, beautiful, even stately, the cottages clustering beneath its shelter like feudal dependencies of old. Yet it is all too small for the great need. My vision sees a Castle of Cheer of such proportions that no one need be turned away for lack of room. Just yesterday there was one such—a woman—a pitiable case. As I saw the hope fade from her brave, anxious face it struck me to the soul. And, Milton, she was one of the poor victims of the Hermann cure. Let the money enlarge The Castle and increase the cottages so that there will be room for all comers; so that no one need ever be denied."

"It is very appropriate," agreed Stroud. "It could do no better work nor be in better hands. It shall go to The Castle."

"It shall go to The Castle," repeated Mary. "As we begin our life together and I try to be your helper in your great work, may the Doane fortune start its mission of enlarging and developing our Castle of Cheer. Let it enrich our lives in giving us a glorified fortress of hope."

And thus the fortune won by fraud and trickery begins a fourfold restoration. It is to enlighten the poorly educated among whom quackery finds its easiest victims, to relieve the poverty of body and soul bred by disease, to give health and life to the afflicted, and to point the weary traveller to the way of peace. Fourfold!

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